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My next memory glides upon me far out at sea. I am strong and rosy, jumping, running, dancing, never tired, and I am happy, too, for I feel myself a favorite, smiled on by the captain, caressed by the crew, petted by the kind old lady taking me to England. This word "England" inspires me with some fear, but I dance and play it off till we land, and then a sudden silence and awe swallow up my memories grimly.

Like a stately picture out of a frame creeping coldly towards me, my first sight of Miss Admonitia returns with a start upon my brain. It comes with the slow tolling of a church-bell; it comes with a funereal march and sound of muffled drums; it comes at times if I wake suddenly at midnight and hear the iron stroke of time knelling the hour. Then, like a ghost, Miss Admonitia's shade glides clear out of all the broken images and shadows of the past, and lays her cold hand again upon me, while back to my heart rushes the sinking fear of the little child, newly landed on a strange shore, a stranger among strangers, gazing wistfully into the stately dark face standing among the crowd to claim her.

Not thus does any remembrance of her sister rise before me. As I sit thus in my quiet room, with these cut sheets of paper beneath my hand, and my pen pausing in mid air, I try in vain to call before my memory the first impression of that pale shadowy figure.

No, I had no first impression of Miss Mildred. She stole upon me as the twilight steals upon the day; she gathered about me silently, as the shadows gather at evening, till we start to see their pale, filmy forms creeping on every path, surrounding us coldly; thus she closed around me, till her power encompassed me about, and held possession of every avenue of my soul.

All that fevered time is past now; the hot yearning, the burning pain, the terrible agony of love and despair quenched in the bitter rain of tears, or deadened by the numbing hand of time, whose kindest cures we shrink from. And as I sit here, remembering with the calmness of old age these trials, this past anguish, looking back on them cheerfully through the long vista of years, I find there is no first picture left on my memory of Miss Mildred sufficiently clear and fixed for my pen to seize. No, all is dim, floating, unshaped, like the rolling mists in a shadowy land, and there is no image tangible and earthly enough to draw out in clear form upon my paper.

But if, sad and weary, I lie sleepless, with window uncurtained, that I may look out upon the deep blue waters of our western sea—so dear to Cornish eyes—then, when I mark the moonlight clear, glittering, shimmering like a pale spirit over the waves in a sheen cold, unfathomable, beautiful, I think of Miss Mildred.

If, in wood or tangled brake, there glides noiselessly across my feet a gray cold viper, in the glitter of its loathsome beauty escaping my scrutiny. I think of Miss Mildred.

Beneath cathedral roof, where the tall pillars stand cold, pure, and stately, in dim religious light, if the pale shadow of some martyred saint, or suffering virgin in faded rose, with golden aureole dimmed and broken, fall across the white marble of a tomb, then, as I look at the meek, unsubstantial image fading away before my view, its suffering once so real, now so unpitied, so silent, so unseen, I bow my head in prayer, and I think of Miss Mildred.

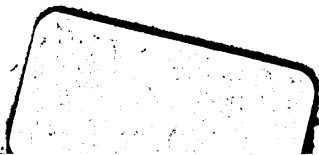
If by a sick bed I have watched death coming in relentless, silent strength, gripping the writhing nerves, quenching the light in the loving eyes still turned warmly to life, and coldly stealing, breath by breath, the reluctant soul away, I have thought with a shudder of the pale woman whose story, like a dark web, is interwoven with my life.

Above all, in the cold dawn, at that hour which is rather night's death than the birth of day, when light hovers quivering over the earth, gray, impalpable, like some strange spirit, uncertain of his path, and seeming to flee the sun rather than to be his harbinger and herald, I think with a remorseful pang of Mildred Tremaine, I recognize in this fleeing, fleeting spirit light her fittest emblem. Cold, unloved, pale, and chill, like her this earliest dawn is looked at shrinkingly, and though for every other hour in the rolling night and day we may find a smile, yet this one we meet with a tear, or turn from with a shudder.

Thus contradictory and strange are the images that recall Miss Mildred to my memory. And even thus in many colors, contrasting the pure blue of love and faith with the fiery red of hatred and revenge, the tangled skein of her history will unwind itself under my hand.

## CHAPTER II.

It was a day of white rolling mists, palpable and wreathy as piled snow, when I landed at Falmouth. Shrinkingly my little feet walked up the slippery granite steps of the pier, but as I reached the top, a tall black figure emerged from the mist, and a cold hand, stretching forward, grasped my quivering fingers. There was no voice nor speech in this action, but I knew that this figure, like my fate, was watching for me; for months, as the ship beat the waves, this hand had been waiting for me, these proud hard eyes had marked her course, these rigid lips had counted the days till her arrival. And as the jerk of the oars brought my little bark through the wall of wreathed cloud, and I loomed out of the misty sea, and she

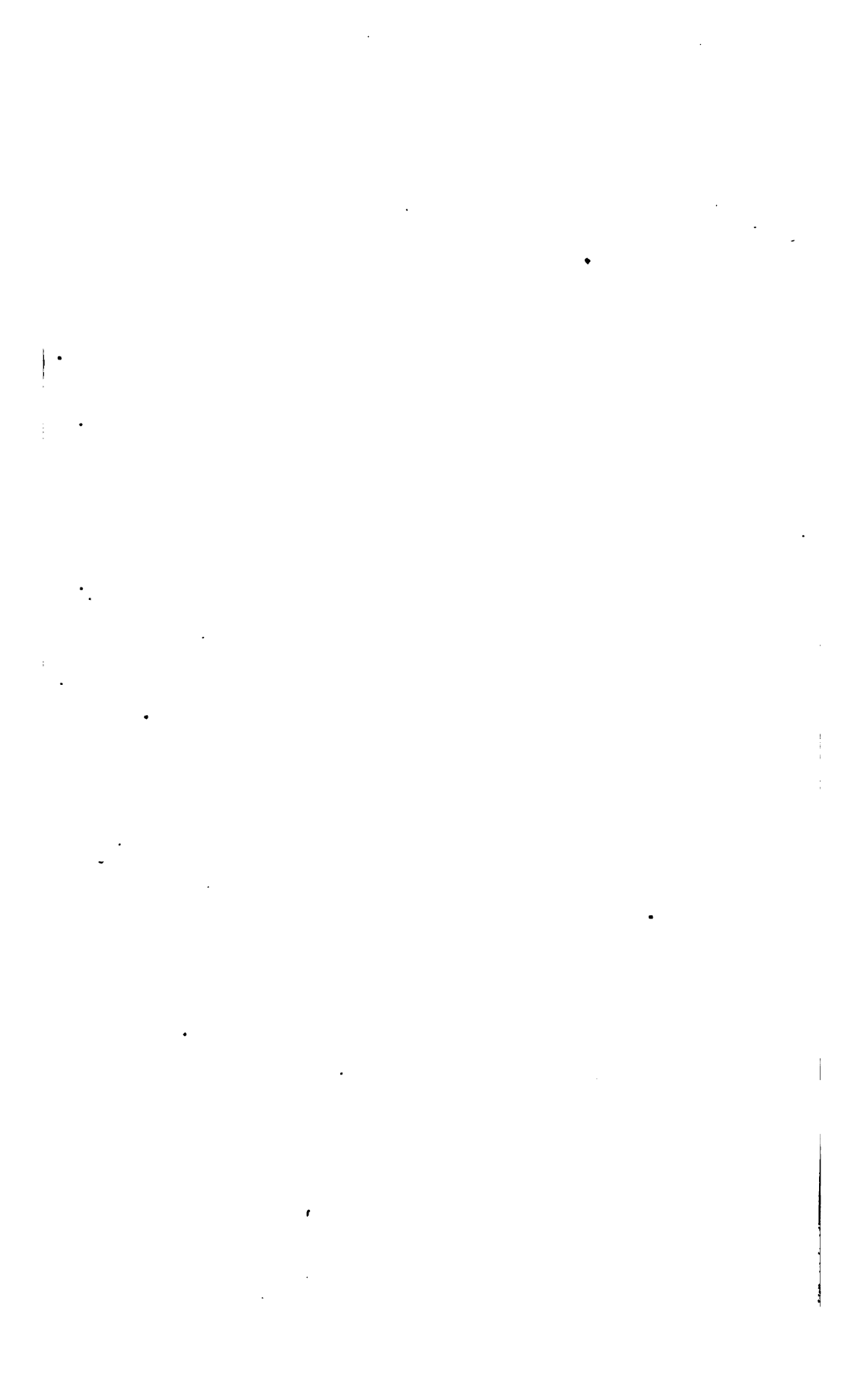


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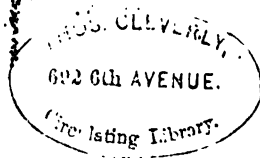






No 1233

# MILDRED'S WEDDING.



A FAMILY HISTORY.

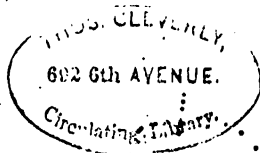
BY

Norley

FRANCIS DERRICK.

"Already full of years and heaviness,  
I turn to former thoughts of young desires."

MICHAEL ANGELO.



NEW YORK:

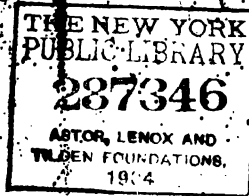
BUNCE & HUNTINGTON:

459 BROOME STREET.

1866.

★Charles T Harbeck

24 MAR 1901



\*Charles T Harbeck

24 MAR. 04

## INTRODUCTION.

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I AM asked by my daughter to write out the eventful history of my youth for the perusal of my grandchildren. I consent on two conditions. Firstly, I must not be found fault with if, in relating past events, I refer to them with the feelings of the present time. No young voice must cry out in criticism, Oh, you were only ten, twelve, fourteen, or whatever age it might be, when this happened; you could not have thought in such or such a way. To all these objections beforehand, I answer, Well, I am sixty-four now I am telling the story, and if in my narration of the incidents of my youth and childhood there creep in, on hobbling gait, the wise saws and sad thoughts of age, I cannot help it. It is the fault of my years, not of my pen. I will promise you that I will often search back into my spirit, and gather up, if I can, those light clouds of fancy that children call thought. But I am old now, and I am not sure that I shall always succeed. The withered leaf at best is but a sad, mocking image of the same leaf in its fresh green spring. Perhaps I shall often give you such an image, and beguile myself with the fancy that it is a garland from the rosy May of my youth.

Forgive me: I glance at my face in this glass standing on my table, and I see I am myself a withered leaf. I can show you, then, only the form of my life, not its freshness.

Moreover, the silken webs of thought are so fragile, and we grow so gradually from youth to age, that we know not when the change began which transformed these gossamer threads of young fancy into strong cables of reason, or iron fetters of care. Then smile if you will if I sometimes present you with mature reflection, as the thought of a child, or if with unwitting hand I paint my portrait of a young girl with the wrinkles of an old woman.

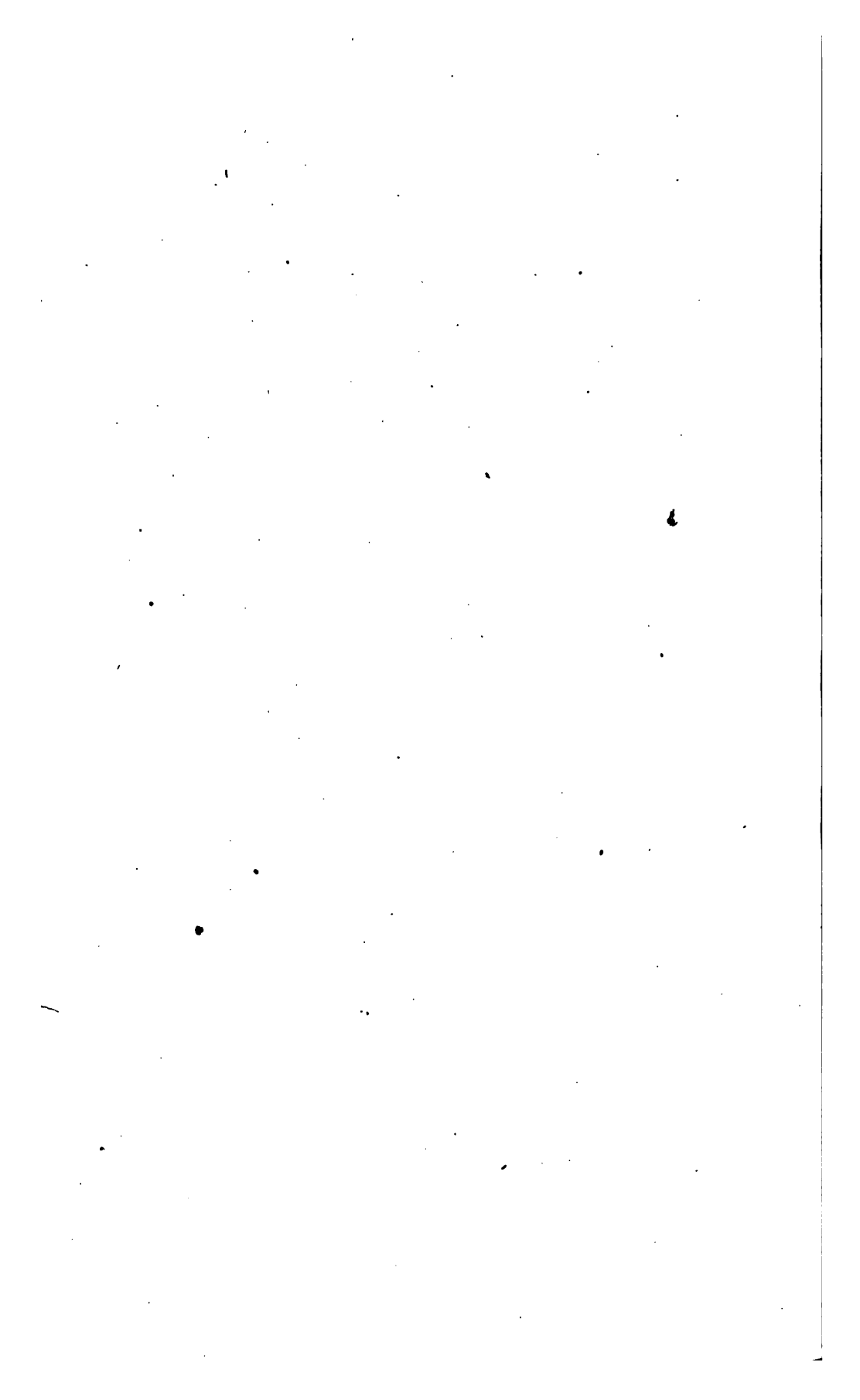
Thus premising of my first condition, I open my second.

It is, that I must be allowed to tell my story my own way, and as it came to me piece by piece, year by year, until it grew into a whole. If then, it appears to you in the same broken shape—here a picture, and there an imperfect utterance, a servant's tale, a child's dream, a night vision, coming and going like the shifting spectra of a kaleidoscope—you must pardon me; it was thus I gathered it up, and I can only relate it as it was painted upon my own mind in a series of strange pictures, one often repeating the other, though drawn by another hand.

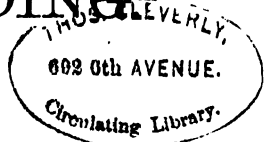
There is yet a reason why you must pardon me if the picture I am now about to paint—into which I work, as it were, all the broken, shifting scenes of which I speak—should not be as perfect as my imagination would fain make it. The reason I will not speak of here. It will come into my tale at its right place. It will come like a blank, and then you will find that such a blank sadly mars the web of a life, and is a chasm which the after-time can only rudely bridge over.

Thus bargaining for your kindness, I dip my pen in the ink, I turn back wistfully to the past, and beckon to the phantoms of the dead whose living forms then shone around me.

ESTHER TREGANOWEN.



# MILDRED'S WEDDING



## CHAPTER I.

You have desired that I should begin with my earliest recollections. First memories are but pictures—photographs, as it were, on the brain, of the images presented to the unreasoning eye of infancy.

My first picture is in this sort. I remember it when any sudden or sultry heat oppresses me with faintness; then before my dimmed sense there rises a place of unnatural stillness, quivering with a vague tremor which is heat; and within this steaming atmosphere I see myself, a little child, bound upon a bed of pain by chains of weakness and languor that seem insufferable. Overhead a large punkah waves with a jerking, restless sound that adds to the sense of stillness, with a monotony that beats painfully on the vexed ear. Over the little white cot I see a face bending—a soldierly face, with dark, passionate eyes, deep and grief-worn—a marked face that one recognizes again after years of absence. And this face stoops over me, and there is a kiss laid on my brow from those full, nervous lips, and then the picture vanishes. There is no beginning to it, and no end; it comes and goes simply like that.

Thinking of it now, I know it must have been a long, weary illness that chained me beneath the swinging punkah, for my next picture looms out of a great blank—a darkness in which I see nothing. It comes upon my memory when the first breeze of the sea touches my face with new freshness after absence. Then, as the first dash of the waters surges on my ear, as the first roll of the waves bounds on my sight, slowly, with a sense of relief from suffering, the picture gleams out of that darkness which was pain, and paints itself thus upon my mind. The deck of a ship, with many figures, much confusion, and a babel of tongues, in the midst the little child of the white cot lying on a small couch; a fresh breeze plays around her, and a feeling of rest like an angel's wing folds her about. An ayah is there attentive to every wish, and the tall gentleman with the marked, sorrowful face is there likewise. But I see the child's eyes fixed wistfully on a little rosy girl, lovely as a cherub, who plays, sings, dances in everybody's way, but

is greeted by all with a kiss, a smile, or a loving word.

Suddenly there is a sharp cry of intense agony; one, two men plunge into the sea, and the laughing vision, pale, wet, senseless, rises on me from amidst the waves, her little form held tightly in the arms of the soldier, whom I know to be my father. The frightened little one, beautiful in her paleness, is laid on the lap of a graceful lady, who has been sitting languidly opposite my couch. The child's streaming garments and wet hair drench and stain the lady's rich silk robe and embroidered shawl, but she takes no heed; she kisses the child passionately, and has no word of thanks for her deliverer. I see it all, and the first *thought* I can remember pierces my baby brain in the shape of a jealous pang, as by some subtle instinct I knew the lady would not thus take me on her lap, would not thus bend over and kiss me, if I were just rescued from death. Then the tall gentleman, drenched with sea-water, and pale but smiling, leans over me, and the first *voice* I can remember adds itself to sight, and involuntarily I join words to my picture.

"Why do you cry, Esther?"

"Because I thought you would be drowned, papa."

And swiftly a third feeling is associated with my vision—a consciousness of shyness, of secrecy, for this thought alone has not caused my tears.

Then the little girl, newly dressed, is brought to my couch, and I am bidden to kiss her, and say good-by, and my father stands there wistfully looking on, his brow contracted, his deep eyes bent on mine. But the lady, holding the child tightly by the hand, stoops carelessly and kisses me; the little one, quick to copy her, presses her rosy mouth with equal lightness upon my cheek, and turns quietly away. They both go down the side of the ship into a gay boat awaiting them, and I, bursting into passionate tears, cry vainly, "Mamma! Mamma!"

Then this picture vanishes too, coming and going, without beginning, without end; for I cannot tell you how I parted with my father, though I loved him best; neither does the vision ever bring me the name of the little girl, nor tell me who she was.



My next memory glides upon me far out at sea. I am strong and rosy, jumping, running, dancing, never tired, and I am happy, too, for I feel myself a favorite, smiled on by the captain, caressed by the crew, petted by the kind old lady taking me to England. This word "England" inspires me with some fear, but I dance and play it off till we land, and then a sudden silence and awe swallow up my memories grimly.

Like a stately picture out of a frame creeping coldly towards me, my first sight of Miss Admonitia returns with a start upon my brain. It comes with the slow tolling of a church-bell; it comes with a funereal march and sound of muffled drums; it comes at times if I wake suddenly at midnight and hear the iron stroke of time knelling the hour. Then, like a ghost, Miss Admonitia's shade glides clear out of all the broken images and shadows of the past, and lays her cold hand again upon me, while back to my heart rushes the sinking fear of the little child, newly landed on a strange shore, a stranger among strangers, gazing wistfully into the stately dark face standing among the crowd to claim her.

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## CHAPTER II.

It was a day of white rolling mists, palpable and wreathy as piled snow, when I landed at Falmouth. Shrinkingly my little feet walked up the slippery granite steps of the pier, but as I reached the top, a tall black figure emerged from the mist, and a cold hand, stretching forward, grasped my quivering fingers. There was no voice nor speech in this action, but I knew that this figure, like my fate, was watching for me; for months, as the ship beat the waves, this hand had been waiting for me, these proud hard eyes had marked her course, these rigid lips had counted the days till her arrival. And as the jerk of the oars brought my little bark through the wall of wreathed cloud, and I loomed out of the misty sea, and she

from the misty land, we knew each other, and our two figures needed no words of recognition as we clasped hands in silence.

Thus, on the seashore, beneath the cliffs of Pendennis, white wreathed, cloud-covered, and vapory, did Miss Admonitia and I meet for the first time.

As she gripped my hand, it appeared to me as though the waves had brought me helplessly to her feet. And since, in my desultory readings, lighting upon stories of water spirits, I have compared myself to one of these, lost in a misty sea, and fate-driven, wandering hither and thither through the cloud-wall, till from without the treacherous wreathed vapors the dreaded land looms dead, and the fainting Undine is clutched by the cold hand of the ungenial earthly gnome who is to hold her in thrall through many vexed years, till in the yearning memory the lore and the love of the sea come but as an unknown light, a craving instinct, or a gnawing pain.

I remember our departure from Falmouth in an old lumbering carriage, drawn by four horses. I remember driving through narrow lanes between hedges honeysuckle-laden, and emerging on the wide downs golden with yellow gorse; but of my arrival at the old mansion of Treval I recollect nothing.

It seemed to me that I *awoke* there after a long sleep—a sleep which had fallen on me in some other land which I could only dimly remember. But I soon got to know the old mansion from roof-top to cellar. How distinctly it rises before my memory now! I could count every window in it, and tell you the names of its twenty-three bedrooms. And yet it is more than half a century ago since my child-shadow haunted it, since that tiny phantom with sunny hair—I can scarcely believe it was myself—wandered alone through its ghostly corridors, waking up the echoes with dancing step, timid song, and rarer laughter.

A gray old shadowy mansion, lying embowered amid its ancient trees, standing in stately strength around it like a giant guard. Huge shadows of gnarled branches and rugged trunks lay on its sunny lawn, stretching out at sunset like gray phantom arms, embracing roof, and window, and tower.

Very pleasant was it for me, as a child, to lie in the summer time on the grass, and watch these shadows as they crept onward and upward over the glittering western front. Then the windows in the setting sun sparkled with purple, gold and crimson, flashing out their colors on the gray, time-worn granite, while the sculptured cornices of grinning imp or smiling cherub, and the old grim heraldic griffins keeping watch and ward above each window, grew alive in the glow, and peeped and muttered, whispering to the child-watcher below of the secret and evil deeds done in the stilly rooms, within which their cruel, impish, stone faces

peered wickedly in the quickening light. Then upwards, upwards crept the long shadows, striking each stone face dead as they touched it, till every purple window died out into leaden paleness, the griffins grew stiff and cold, the smiling angels battered, and worn, and sorrowful, helpless now to cheer or comfort, and the imps alone kept their cruel leer, and with furtive glance in the gathering darkness, peered down maliciously on the frightened child, holding her little mantle around her, creeping wistfully towards the portal, a troubled ocean of thought, of poesy, of fear, surging round her fluttering heart.

When winter came, the stone faces in gray coldness looked out upon a drear landscape of heath and moor, with golden patches of yellow gorse shining like some wintry fire amid bare glistening rocks of granite upheaved in giant confusion, like mighty ruins of some great city crumbled in an earthquake, or at times deceiving the eye in fantastic shapes emulating humanity, glaring back at the carved masks with faces stonier and mightier than theirs. Here a profile in ghastly distinctness, with beard of clustered heath, and hair of tufted fern; there a full face with beetling brows, shadowed by young pine, and hair on end with horror, while a frightful scar ran hideous across the stony cheek, and, distorting the bearded lips of hairy moss, showed the great granite teeth within.

Close by the western front stood a huge cedar, that had seen a thousand years go by, and had watched the cunning hands beneath whose skill the stone faces lived and grew, while even before the cedar was, these mightier faces cut on the gray moor had lain still and quiet in their stony strength, mocking at the works of man. Seated high up amid the branches of this great tree, with some book of wild romance or poesy in my hand, I watched through many an hour of the day, shaping the clouds into armies, making the long roll of fleecy smoke sweeping from the hidden artillery, and shouting with delight, or holding my breath in silent awe, when a slanting ray of the winter sun shot forth like a flashing spear or javelin. And sometimes the rolling ranks opened, and the king, in a chariot of glittering silver, came forth from the distant blue, warriors stood around him in wreathed and sable darkness, banners fluttered, and flags unfurled. Then the driving winds arose, and the serried ranks were rent in twain, as with flames of fire and a clash of thunder the captain of the opposing host came stately forth to meet the king. Now rank rushed on rank, and in a tempest of pelting hail, sleet, or rain, I left my cloudy warriors direfully mingled in the din and storm of battle.

Often I liked to watch the stony faces on the wall, and, filled with imaginings of

their dire hate of children, I set the colder shoes on the moor in array against them. Slowly, ponderously. I brought the huge giants from their heathy bed, and marshalled them on the sloping lawn before the western front.

"Now!" I cried, and at the sound of my voice each granite hand uplifted struck its blow, and not the stony faces only, but the whole mansion, crumbled into dust, and I, a little houseless child, shivered among the cedar leaves, and wondered at my work.

Then, looking up, I saw the cruel griffins and the wicked elves all gazing at me with a cold wonder too, and a newer hate in their hard eyes, that I, a puny child, not of their blood—for the ancient race that wore the griffin had long died out—should dare to bring a battle array of phantoms against them to do them hurt. And I covered my eyes with my hand, or shut out their angry faces with the fluttering cedar leaves, or, jumping down from my wintry nest, I tried to play and forget my fancies.

But there were things in that house that would not let me play or be a child like other children. There were strange whispers floated about in those long corridors; and in the lofty rooms, with their high ceilings and their tall windows, footsteps echoed whose *living* tread *ner* I *ner* any had ever heard.

There was one shadow, too, that came and went with a great pain upon its face as it flitted by—a pain before which I shrink and cowered. And not daring to whisper of that unearthly woe to any human being, I told it to the cedar leaves, and they whispered it back to the winds, like the old classic fable of the rushes and the king's secret. It was only from the cedar I saw this face, and we watched it together and kept our secret well, for the wind's voice among its branches passed unheeded by all ears save mine. I had to clamber high up into the old tree, and peer and watch it might be the whole day long, before it came, perchance once, perchance twice, like a pale ghost hurrying across the white wall opposite, and then vanishing.

I cared more for this fleeting vision than for the fighting armies of the sky, or my granite warriors supine, stupendous on the heath, or even for the stony faces, who were too strong for me I knew, and who hated me as an alien, living, sleeping, in rooms belonging to *their* dead whom they had loved and watched over. So day after day I climbed the cedar-tree, and gazed in a longing that was half fear at the white blank wall visible through the closed window. And then my heart stood still, as creeping, gliding over it came that long, sharp profile I had learned to know so well. Straight up and straight down, no change in the attitude, no change in the fixed pain of its terrible face, it passed up and down the wall.

I tried to see it from another place, but I climbed in vain the great laburnum, the flowering thorn, and the old lime-tree, all of which stood near the cedar. From these the window presented only a blank aspect in which no mystery mingled. Thus it was that after many trials I found that from the cedar only, I gained a sight of this white wall and its creeping shadow. So there I sat silent as the days went by me, sinking softly one by one into the western sea, like shining sands dropping, ever dropping, from the hour-glass of time into the ocean of eternity.

And the hurrying cloud spirits looked down on me as I kept watch, and the stately rock phantoms gazed across the moor in calm watchfulness, one figure with granite hand uplifted and clenched, save for the index finger which seemed to point in unchanging fixedness to the window above the cedar-tree.

What was it pointing at, I wondered, and what were the stone faces saying as they whispered together in the chilly air.

In vain I strove to pierce the secret of their mystic voices; in vain I watched the window and the white blank wall within, on which there flitted once, twice in a week the thin profile with its haggard look of woe. It told me nothing; the faces told me nothing, the granite hand pointing from the heath told me nothing, and yet all spoke in some sorrowful, hidden, unuttered language that stirred within me a strange awe. I felt as though possessed by a spirit who had come to me from many wanderings grief-laden and weary, but unable to speak in human words, he vainly strove to teach me his unknown tongue, and failing, succeeded only in touching my heart continually and sorrowfully with his sorrows, mutely, dimly filling it with a sense of his wrongs. The cedar leaves, the cloudy sky, the granite giants upon the heath, the stone faces, and the sharp profile on the blank wall were all trying to be his interpreters, I fancied.

As I pursued the simile, the spirit would seem to me to grow into myself. Thus did I live; thus uncomprehended, sad, and lonely was my child-life at Treval. No love, no kind words, no demonstrative fondness unlocked with sweet caress my trembling speech. Miss Mildred and her sister, Miss Admonitia Tremaine, were ever to me stately, cold, and proud as these stone faces. Then warm memories of my father and the glowing land I had left came to me with tears, and raised a hot yearning in my heart for a tenderer love than their chill, forced kindness knew how to give.

As time went on and the years passed slowly by, I grew more and more lonely and strange, till at last, running wild and unnoticed amid the stores of a great library, and wandering up and down in that old house listening to the legends told of its

haunted rooms, or traversing alone the tangled walks and dark alleys of its great garden and park, what wonder that I became morbid and fanciful?

Still that profile on the wall was not altogether a fancy, and again and again I climbed the cedar to watch for it, till, in the pale sunshine of one short November day, as it came gliding in its old monotonous fixed way along the blank wall, I set myself to think steadfastly about it.

"How long is it ago since I first noticed it?" I asked myself.

I could answer—I could fix on the bright day in spring when the shadow of that white, terrible face had first caught my eye. I could see again on the lawn the bright shower of gold falling from the laburnum, the heavy bunches of lilac perfuming the air, the rose-pearl blossoms of the hawthorn drifting away like scented snow before the breeze; and I could feel again the cloud, the gloom, the sudden winter that pale face brought upon me in the midst of the spring sunshine. I could remember this, but I could not tell how many years I had been at Treval when it happened.

"Through two summers and one winter," said I, thoughtfully, "I have watched this phantom without speaking of it and without seeking to penetrate its secret. I am older now, and I will find out what the thing is. Firstly, *where* is that window?"

I clasped my hands with a sudden thought like an inspiration.

I would count the windows outside on the western front, and then I would count them again from the rooms within, and see if the number tallied.

### CHAPTER III.

I SET to work immediately, and found there were twenty-two windows in all, six on the centre projection—the house being of Tudor architecture, and built in the peculiar form of that time, with the middle portion slightly in advance of the rest—and eight on each side, of which six were on the depressed or flat portion of the front, and two on the advanced or projecting portions at the ends. These two—or, rather, four windows, if we count both ends—were of great size and height. They had been altered without taking from them their ancient character, and they now stretched to the whole height of the house, an intermediate story having evidently been sacrificed to render the rooms in these wings of a lofty and fitting proportion. On the ground floor these apartments consisted of the drawing-room and library, the intervening windows lighting the dining and breakfast rooms, and a second drawing-room, lighted by the two

narrow windows in the centre division of the front.

Above each window, with the exception of the four larger and less ancient ones of which I have spoken, the heraldic griffin kept watch and ward. Below the griffins, at the corner of each casement, peered the stony imps, with starting eyeballs and malignant leer; midway down were the winged cherubs; while at the base the imp was reproduced with the addition of an heraldic shield held up between two gauntleted hands, while beneath the middle windows ran a carved stone motto mingled with gothic tracery, and the repetition of the letter L cut in many quaint ways.

This letter was said to represent Lancaster, the builder of the house being a stalwart baron in the Wars of the Roses, and triumphant and enriched by the victory of his party at the accession of Henry, the first Tudor, he perpetuated his Lancastrian prejudices by the repetition of this initial, accompanied by the red rose, which met you on mantel-piece and panel in many a quaint garland at every turn in the old house.

The four large and more modern windows had no griffins, no letter L, and no motto. The architect had done his best to imitate the carved mullions, with their impish and cherub heads, but he had not attempted to copy faithfully the other devices.

As though it were yesterday, I remember the fitful day—now cloudy, now sunny—in November on which I first marked all this, while I counted and recounted the number of windows, and the rooms to which they belonged. I knew them all, for I was free to run in and out, and to and fro, in the house as I would. It was easy to count the windows of the great drawing-room, and the panelled dining-room, with its mysterious door behind the shutter opening with a spring, divulging a narrow staircase, dark, winding, and hung with cobwebs, down which I had never ventured, but which report said led to an underground apartment, whence secret staircases conducted to every part of the house. I knew afterwards all this was false, but then I knew also that Miss Mildred's story was false likewise, when she said that these stairs led only to a small cellar, in which, in the old drunken days of England, the wine to be consumed in a drinking-bout was stored away to be conveniently near the roysterers.

The long, narrow tapestried drawing-room came next, with its two gothic windows on the western front, and its strangely modern bay-window at the opposite end, looking out on a plat of grass and flowers called the Bees' Nest, because here was nestled a row of hives beneath syringa-trees, on which the morning sun shone brightly both in summer and winter. Next came the breakfast-room—rather small, though nobly lighted—and

lastly, the great library, with its huge window to match the drawing-room.

There was no need, then, to puzzle myself much with these: but in the upper stories the number of windows appertaining to bedrooms, staircases, and closets made a confusion in my mind which rendered it impossible for me to fix on the room to which the window opposite the cellar belonged.

Slowly I crept down from the tree, and, entering the house by a small door on the south side—for the great state doors on the north, for some reason, were never opened—I ran up the great staircase, and going from room to room, and from closet to closet, I gazed from each window down upon my seat in the cedar.

No one slept in these desolate rooms through which I crept so thoughtfully, and the huge beds, with their heavy drapery, looked sepulchral. This part of the house was only kept up for show now, as the family saw no company, and the only one who inhabited a room on this side was Miss Mildred, with her old servant Martha, who slept in a little chair-bed by her side. Some thought it strange they should sleep in this wing of the mansion alone, but they never seemed to be afraid.

I was sure then of meeting no one as I continued my search, so I went on slowly through the long corridor, pondering strangely as I laid my hand in succession on each lock. I found none fastened. Door by door I opened them softly, pausing for a moment each time before, with a long-held breath, I ventured within. I began at the end furthest from the cedar-tree, and as, window by window, I drew nearer to it, I paused longer at the door, and my hand trembled and my breath came shorter. But even when so near that, as I stepped within the threshold, I closed my eyes, fearing that woful face would shine upon me from the white wall opposite, still there was nothing—always nothing. In every room a stately bed, heavy with cornice, tester, and curtains; some old carved furniture; a thick faded carpet; a portrait or two, pallid and cracked, or some framed bits of needlework, with silks all dusty and yellow, like the dead hand that wrought them: and the glinting sunshine, quivering in pale and feeble ray; but nothing more. No shadow of life—no white woe-begone face passing by the wall with restless motion, like madness. No—none of this; and it was something like this I had come to see.

I had opened every window and leaned out from each, relieved, yet strangely disappointed, when suddenly, as I was slowly counting over the long line I had passed, I perceived with a strange chill and awe that I had visited every room save the bedroom and sitting room of the sisters. I have explained that the centre of the western front consisted of three stories, while

the sides or projecting wings only possessed two, the rooms here having been heightened and the windows enlarged. Over the drawing-room thus heightened was the large state bedroom, where King Charles II. slept when on his way to Falmouth, whence he embarked for Holland. At the other end, over the library, was the pleasant sitting-room of the sisters, where they sat all day, save when they descended to a sunny room on the south side to receive their rare visitors. No one living was admitted to them here. Indeed, it was rarely that even I entered this sitting-room of theirs. I mostly ran wild, going hither and thither as I pleased, no one restraining me after my morning governess—the curate's sister—and my tutor had departed, and no one seeking to be a companion of my lonely ways. Now, however, I ran towards this room with a swift and eager step, and my heart beat fast as I tapped at the door.

"Who is it? what do you want?" asked Miss Mildred.

What did I want? I stood still with fear, and turned pale as I echoed the words. I knew that I lived in a world of my own, of which these two maiden sisters guessed nothing. I knew that I raised up phantoms and made spirits come and go at my bidding. And now was I to confess these things? Was I to lay bare the most cherished secrets of my imagination, and show these strange, chill companions of mine to minds who could not understand me? Instinctively I shrank from the thought, and releasing the handle of the door, which I held in my small cold hand, I fled away to some quiet nook where I could think by myself.

Mildred's clear calm voice pursued me. "What did I want?"

I leaned my head on my clasped hands, and distinctly, like a painful quiver of light, the answer came into my brain.

I wanted to understand what I had seen—I wanted to seize this my last and deadliest phantom with a tangible grasp, and settle at once and forever whether it was something real, or whether it belonged to the cloud shapes that too often haunted my fevered, lonely imagination.

Could I say this to the pale Miss Mildred, ever lost in prayer, macerating herself with fasts, and fearful of sinning if she spoke above her breath? Could I dare say it to the hard, stern, proud Miss Admonitia, whose white face flushed so sullen red if aught was whispered before her that seemed to touch the family dignity?

What! should I presume to say, I had seen shadows, phantoms, a ghastly face, coming and going in restless woe, on a wall in *her* house—the old, stately house that had stood in honor unblemished these three hundred years?

No, I dared not do it. She would tell me

I was mad; and Miss Mildred, with meek eyes, would say I was wicked, and would bid me go fast and pray.

My governess, should I tell her? Again my head fell down on my clasped hands as I turned over this question in my mind, and again my heart said no.

She would say it was all imagination, the morbid fancy of a girl with a sickly mind, who loved dreamy idleness and selfish, phantom-haunted moods of silence before all cheerful talk, work, or play. And I trembled as I thought of a consultation between her and the sisters over my moral health, and the remedy they might suggest to cure me. I was in their hands—my father, my mother, thousands of miles away—they could send me to a cruel school, or shut me up in one room, in prison if they liked. All my pulses fluttered and my limbs drooped like a caged bird's as I thought of this, and felt that I was only a weak, wretched little child, helpless as an orphan. I had better be silent, and keep free, even if my teeming brain drove me crazy, or my bursting heart broke in the struggle.

Thus thinking, I cried long and silently—self-pitying, luxurious tears, whose selfishness in after-years, I learned to blush for.

I was sitting on nearly the top stair of a lonely flight that led to the highest garret, and now, resting my head on the step above me, I fell asleep.

#### CHAPTER IV.

WHEN I awoke, a long trail of purple glory was falling across me from a small western window, against which the setting sun was flashing golden. A sudden longing seized me to be out in the air—to be somewhere away from those long lines of shining dust, gold-sprinkled by the sun, but quivering to me with a thousand impish shapes—spinning, twirling, dancing, mocking, and making gibes at my flushed cheeks, tear-stained and fevered. How should I get away? Where reach the free breath of heaven, and escape these hideous fancies?

I started up as I remembered I was close by the long, narrow black door, behind which stood a steep flight of steps, or, rather, a ladder—leading to the roof. In a moment I had this door open, and stood hesitatingly on the threshold. It was not that I was afraid; I had climbed those steps a hundred times before, and knew well the trick of the trap-door at the top, through which I should clamber out on the great lead roof and revel in the wind and the setting sunshine. It was not fear, but an undefinable presentiment—a superstition, if you will—that turned me icy cold, and

impelled me forward even while it repulsed me.

I stepped within the door, and had mounted two or three of the steep rings of the ladder, when something white and fluttering caught my view, moving in the distant darkness.

Let me explain and make clear, if I can, the position in which I found myself. Firstly, the door, which was exceedingly high and narrow, and from some fantasy painted black, opened outwards, thereby darkening the light from the small window I have spoken of. It stood on the top of two steps, which were on the right of the lonely flight where I had fallen asleep. Immediately opposite was the door leading to the garret corridor, or topmost gallery of the house, on the left hand of which a heavy railing protected you from the whole depth of the great staircase, down which you looked giddily. Beneath, on the same hand—that is, opposite—were two galleries, one above another, with their long range of doors; while on your right in this gallery stood the doors of four garret bedrooms; and at the end, opposite the door by which you entered, was a lumber-closet. I name all this that you may understand that nothing ungrifted with wings could reach the narrow black door leading to the roof unless it passed up the flight of stairs on which I lay sleeping.

At this hour there was not a soul in the garrets or in the closet. Who or what, then, had passed me as I lay there in the slanting sunshine?

I asked myself this question with a beating heart as I stood on the ring of the ladder and watched this white fluttering thing creeping along with an uncertain movement. Suddenly, round a sharp angle, it disappeared, and I instantly, moved by curiosity, determined to follow it.

Once more I find myself obliged to give you a distinct detail of the place, in order that you may follow me clearly in this history.

The ladder stood directly inside the door, to the right as you entered. On that same side was a wall close against you; on the left, a rude balustrade of rope protected you as you climbed. Beyond, on this left side, stretched a great open space or chamber, without flooring, and without other ceiling than the slates and rafters. This vast place, stretching beneath the roof over all the southern front, received no light save such stray beams as struggled through the slates. To the right, beyond the wall, a narrow, tortuous passage led to a similar space over the chambers of the western front. By crossing from beam to beam it was thus possible to traverse the whole of these two sides of the house; but on the north this space beneath the roof had been turned into garrets and other offices.

The distinct light from the door, clearly defined in a sharp, well-out figure behind me, scarcely penetrated far into the gloom, yet as I stood thus on the third or fourth ring of the ladder, I had plainly seen this fluttering thing creeping towards me. Suddenly, as I have said, it disappeared round the angle of the wall, and it was then I determined to follow it. Descending the ladder rapidly, I made my way with ease across the beams till I reached this angle; here all light from the door ceased to penetrate, and I found myself plunged in thick darkness. I was at the entrance of the twisting passage of which I have spoken. I had never yet ventured through this place, and I stood now a moment hesitating as to what I should do. I remembered that about six months ago I had been sitting in a room at the southwest corner with our seamstress, when we were both startled by the apparition of a buckled shoe and shapely calf dangling from the ceiling, wagging frantically to and fro, to the detriment of lath and plaster, as it endeavored to free itself and join its attending body above. This leg belonged to our footman, Timothy Pryor, a man of an exploring and enterprising disposition, who with a lantern had set out on a voyage of discovery round this very corner, and had come to grief prematurely by placing his foot on the ceiling instead of on a beam. I recollected the dire anger of Miss Admonitia when she heard of it, and remembered she had alleged as her chief reason for forbidding all further explorations, that the explorer ran a chance of being killed if both feet slipped, and he fell through to the floor beneath. Now, I dreaded Miss Admonitia's anger, and I had no fancy for being killed; thus I stood a moment at the entrance of the passage—the footman's history, which it has taken so many words to tell, flashing through my mind in an instant.

An instant more I gave to a vain longing for a candle, and then I had turned the sharp angle, and in pitch darkness was groping my way on. I knew by the warmth on my right hand that the wall against which I was creeping was that of the great group of chimneys which stood at the southwest corner of the mansion, and, pressing the palms of my hands against this wall, I felt with my feet for the beams, and got on slowly but safely. But when the wall first failed me, and my groping hand pressed only the air, I had nearly fallen, and only saved myself by going on my hands and knees. In this position I remained a moment to consider what I should do, and at the same instant the creeping, indistinct mass I had seen from the ladder fluttered by near me. I started up with a low cry, and attempted to follow rapidly, but the darkness and danger of the route hindered me. I don't know that I was afraid. Looking

back on that time now, I think I can safely say it was more a feeling of burning curiosity than any other which possessed me—a strange curiosity made up of many feelings; mysterious longings to know somewhat of the unseen world; an impatient, fevered desire to gauge the truth of my many phantoms, and decide, once for all, whether they possessed a tangible existence, or were mere creatures of my brain—a dread whether they should indeed be the last, forcing upon me the conviction that a species of madness was seizing me—a madness spectre-haunted and terrible, before which I shuddered.

If any terror drove me on, it was this terror, as I felt I could bear to face this white creeping horror in front of me, and seize it, and tear from it its worst secret, rather than, by leaving it unexamined, let the thought of it seethe in my brain till I should scarcely know whether it was the spectre of a heated imagination, or a reality perceived by my sane eyesight. I pressed my hand against my forehead as there came steaming through my thoughts a legion of old stories, dreams, portents, which bore some relation to my present position; and a resolve came over me with the fierceness of fire to prove to myself that I was of sound reason when I saw this thing, or else to renounce for ever the dangerous reading and reveries which led me into this course of thought.

I dashed on recklessly in the painful darkness, but had scarcely taken a dozen steps before I fell. As I rose again, very little hurt, I fancied the creeping white horror I was pursuing had stopped a moment as if to listen. I even fancied it had half turned, and a shape like a head had looked at me.

The light came faintly and rarely through the heavy slates of the roof, scarcely even to eyes accustomed to the darkness, enabling them to see the beams on which it was requisite to tread. I determined then to *crawl* instead of walk, and feeling the beams with my hands as I went, I got on much faster. I began to gain on the phantom, when a new thought suddenly struck me still, overwhelming me with a tide of changed feeling.

It was a *human being* I was pursuing, and it was crawling like myself. This was the uncertain hideous action that had first appalled me, but now as I approached nearer it was evident the movement was that of a person on her knees. I say *her* knees, for the mass was too floating and draped for a man.

"Stop!" I screamed, as I clung with both hands to the beam on which I was resting.

My voice came back to me in a dreary echo dust-laden, but the thing I was pursuing hurried on faster.

"It shall not baffle me," said I aloud, as I set my teeth fiercely together and tried by

the sound of my own voice to drown the loud beating of my heart.

Anger was added now to my other feelings, and I sped on with a swiftness I could scarcely have believed possible. I had all the courage of my race; a stupid servant playing me a trick or a thief hiding should find I was no coward.

I went on in blind, mad haste; but with all my efforts I could not go with the *directness* of this creeping woman—if woman it were. She went with a certainty, a knowledge of her way, if I may so express it, which baffled my superior speed. Still I began to gain on her; I put out my hand; I nearly touched her garment.

"Stop, demon! thief! murderess!" I cried, almost beside myself.

There was no reply, save by a sudden start—a rustle as if some one in amazement and sharp fear, and then a rapid bound removed her several feet from me.

Again I shrieked out to her to stop, and then I dashed on so madly that, not perceiving a second wall in front, I struck my head with a sounding blow against it and fell forward heavily. For a moment I was stunned; then rising, I perceived the figure had stopped at some little distance beyond the wall; its head was turned towards me, and in a faint glimmer of light which shone around it I saw the face of my worst phantom—the face I had that day sought in every room, the dreadful woebegone face for which I had watched so often in the cedar-tree.

Transfixed in horror I gazed at it, while in its dead-white, haggard aspect no consciousness glimmered of my look, yet at a slight movement I made it bounded away again, and disappeared so suddenly that its vanishing had for me a greater terror than its appearance.

For a moment I could not follow. I trembled in every limb and a deathly sickness overpowered me, but conquering this by a great effort, I felt my way along the wall till I reached the angle; here I perceived a narrow passage like the one I had passed at the opposite end. And through this came the faint light, like a narrow line, a pointed lance, a spirit finger in the glimmer of which I had seen the face. As I entered this passage something white came fluttering towards me. I stood right in its way and seized it as it passed. Holding it tightly against me with both hands, I felt that it was paper—immense sheets of peculiar paper, thin but coarse. I clenched it all tightly and gasped for breath.

Some cold wind was blowing on me, which brought strength and courage into that dark, dusty atmosphere, and drove away all my faintness. A few steps more and I had cleared the passage and stood dazzled in a blaze of light streaming from an open window in the roof.

## CHAPTER V.

WITH what thankfulness I rushed to that little casement, and leaning far out breathed the fresh air, and inhaled the beauty of the glorious prospect without, I can never forget. Oh what a contrast to the stifling dust, terror, and darkness around me a moment ago! There was the fair green lawn with its noble groups of trees; there the moor with its patches of golden fire, its granite heads, and limbs of broken giants; and beyond glimmered a faint white line which I knew to be a roll of breakers dashing over a low reef, out in the dancing, fetterless sea. The breeze from the boundless Atlantic blew freshly over me, and rejoicing in the pure air, I ceased for a moment to think of the darkness and the phantom behind me.

Then I turned nervously, and examined the spot where I found myself. I was evidently at the extreme northwest corner of the roof. Inside this wall, on one side, were the attics of the north front, but there was no door of communication between them and this place, though there had evidently been an intention of turning it into a garret chamber, else why this window, and these boards rudely laid down for flooring? In the great wall of chimneys was pierced a small hole, as for a grate, and on the western side was a niche, shelved and laden with dusty books and papers. I examined all this with a hasty but searching glance, and nowhere could I see an outlet for escape save in the open window. By this way, then, my phantom had departed, and again I determined to follow.

Do not let me startle you. Remember, I was a country child, wild and free as a deer, and I lived in the wildest part of England, where the great boundless ocean, and the wide waste moors gave to its people a freedom of thought and action unknown to the inhabitants of inland trimly-cut landscapes. Some, then, might have turned giddy at the thought; but I was a fearless climber, and had often clambered over rocks and precipices where many men would not have cared to follow. Moreover, the roof was a favorite spot of mine. Many an hour had I spent on the leads, and once I had frightened even the brave Miss Admonitia by appearing like a tiny speck behind one of the gothic pinnacles, and shouting to her when she was on the lawn. To attain this I had left the leads and clambered down the slates. And here I must explain that only one portion of the roof possessed leads—that is, the part which tradition said had been altered when the new staircase was built, and the drawing-room and library heightened. On the whole, the Tudor appearance of the house was well preserved by the pinnacles and high roof which concealed the flat platform of lead behind it.

I am vexed I am obliged to interrupt my



narrative with these descriptions, but without them you could not understand my story.

I proceed to say that you must not think of me as you would of other girls of my age. Think that I could ride and row like a boy, and climb trees and cliffs like a cat, and then you will not shudder when I tell you I boldly launched myself from the slanting casement on to the roof, and in two minutes had gained the leads safely.

I may truly say, at this time of my life—I was a little past thirteen—I feared nothing upon earth but ghosts, and these certainly were always pursuing me. Fearlessly I had turned my head and contemplated the giddy height at which I hung when clinging by my hands to the casement; but now that I was on the roof, and the delicious air of sunset blew freshly on my flushed cheeks and hot, dusty hands, I feared to open my eyes, lest that ghastly dead-white face should meet them. A moment of this shrinking terror, and then I had searched all round with anxious glance, to find—nothing. All was bare. Here were the naked leads, the great piles of chimneys, the carved pinnacles, and long shadows of sunset, myself, and solitude—nothing more. The wind blew with glorious freedom around me, dashing my long hair about my cheeks, the sun was fast setting, and a mist was coming in from the sea. I felt that I must sit down somewhere quietly, and think over this strange thing, for now I was conscious of feeling wildly—almost crazily—and I wanted to calm myself and come to some decision in my own mind about it.

I sought out my accustomed spot in the loo—as the Cornish call a shelter—of the great chimney-pile. Here I found the piece of cake, yellow with saffron, which I had left behind me when I was last here a week ago; and I smiled at myself to think what a child I was then. I felt now I should never be a child again. Then, looking dreamily out upon the sea, I began to think, and my thoughts shaped themselves thus:

All the visions I had had, the fairies, pixies, spirits I had seen, the spectres that had followed me, were of my own seeking. I had called them to me, and had experienced a shrinking pleasure, a delicious awe, in their presence. But this was a phantom of another shape—this I had *not* called. It had a reality about it unknown to me before—a reality and yet a deathliness that had first struck me when I watched it from the cedar-tree in its monotonous passage up and down the blank wall. But there it had been only a shadow, a profile; here it had come to me like a face in substance, though with the hue and pallor of death.

At this time I had never read of instances where the mind confuses reality with imagination till at length the line is passed which divides reason from insanity. I had never

heard then of the painter who placed his sitters in their chairs, and continued their portraits long after they had left his studio.

For how long he did this safely none can tell, but at last his mind confused the imaginary sittings with the real, and he spoke to patrons of having had their parents, their children, in his studio when they were hundreds of miles away. He spoke of having had them when, alas! they were dead and buried. He shook hands with friends, and thanked them for their long sittings given him but yesterday, when they had not seen his face for months. And then the end came, and an asylum swallowed up his innocent, useful life for twenty years.\* Had I read of such things, a new terror would have stirred me; but, as it was, the doubt that tormented me was this:

Had I called the devil to me by my wild aspirations towards the spirit world? By my fantastic imaginings of ghosts had I raised a real one, and was I to be forever tormented by this creature, like those demon-haunted men of whom I had read, who wandered haggard through the world, fleeing vainly their curse? Was I lost and wicked? Had I given myself over to Satan in following the wanderings of my wild imagination, and revelling free in the thousand visions that rose fantastic at my call? Was it a deadly sin to do this, and was this phantom-horror my punishment? Or did other children do the same?—did they think as I thought, feel as I felt, and see sometimes, too, such things as these? And was it no harm to see them?

I looked out upon the darkening sky and the white line of breakers in the sea with pondering eyes, but no answer came to my questions. What did I know of other children? There was only little Tom Pengrath, who weeded the flower beds, whom I could ask, and he knew nothing. I had tried him many times, and never found any thing but emptiness and greediness—an insatiable appetite for currant-cake, half-pence, and twice—nothing more in him.

Other children had their fathers and mothers to ask, and then, if it was wicked to think such strange things as I thought, a mother would tell her daughter, and they would pray together, and God would forgive this sin of ignorance; and if some evil spirit in horrible shape like this phantom-woman came ever crouching, creeping near the child, He whom unclean spirits dared not disobey would drive the haunting horror away.

“O mother, mother!” I cried in my agony, “why are you so far away from your child?”

Then I knelt down to pray, with my face towards the setting sun, and, while the

\* Related in Dr. Wigan's work on the “Duality of the Mind.”

tears streamed from my eyes, I implored that my father or mother might be sent to me, or that some good man who could exorcise evil spirits might come miraculously to my aid.

Do the young faces smile here for whom I am writing? Ah, you so tenderly nurtured in watchful affection, what can you tell of the terrors of my lonely childhood? Remember how I had been brought up—what stories, wild as the scenery, had been poured into my ears—stories of pixies, of ghosts, of haunted houses, of deep mines where the spirits of ancient miners worked in the lonely levels—stories of bleak moors where demons wandered in the shape of dogs, black and gaunt, and, above all, the story of Treg-eagle, that desolate spirit who, on the wide moor where lies Doznare Pool, howls in despair over his impossible tasks. Think of all this before you condemn me as ignorant and foolish, and remember I had no guide, no parent, no one to love me; and the times sixty years ago were as the dark ages compared to the days in which we live now.

I am an old woman, and tell my tale with too many breaks and reflections. I will go on more rapidly now.

I rose from my knees calm and refreshed by my outpouring of tears and words; moreover, my faith was so great that I felt sure God would send me help. In rising, my dress, which I had tied up short to aid my climbing, fell down, and with it the great crumpled sheets of paper which had come rustling to meet me in the dark arched passage. I had tied them up in my dress in order to have my hands free when I got from the window. I spread these papers out now on my knee. They were all alike—great, flaring, yellow papers, printed in enormous letters; and I read these gigantic words:

**"ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.**

"Whereas, on the night of the 16th instant, the mansion of Treval was feloniously broken into by a gang of thieves, habited in black masks, who overcame, gagged, and bound the three servants who alone awoke and perceived them, and then carried off the following articles of plate and jewelry."

Here came a list which I need not copy.

"And whereas, it was discovered on the morning after the burglary that Miss Alicia Tremaine was missing. It is supposed that this young lady was barbarously murdered by these miscreants, and her body secreted. Therefore, his Majesty the King hereby graciously offers 200*l.* reward and a free pardon to any person, or persons, or accomplice, who will divulge such facts as shall lead to the apprehension of the culprits and to the recovery of Miss Alicia Tremaine, dead or living.

"Also, Sir Theobald Tremaine, of Treval, does, on his part, offer a reward of 500*l.* to whomsoever shall restore to him his missing daughter, or recover her dead body. And Admiral Treganowen, of Treganowen Towers, offers an additional sum of 300*l.* for the like purpose"

I paused in my reading, aghast and astonished, for Admiral Treganowen was my grandfather, and I had but to turn my head to see the towers of Treganowen faintly outlined against the evening sky. The place was cold, desolate, and shut up, now my father was away, but Miss Mildred and I drove over there every three months; and this very seat of mine on the roof I had chosen because from hence I could see the home that was one day to be mine, when the parents I could scarcely remember came to claim me.

Then what was the meaning of this handbill? and why should my grandfather care so much for this murdered Alicia Tremaine that he identifies himself with her father in offering this large reward?

I thought and wondered till the sun set, and the gathering darkness of a November evening grew chilly around me. Then, cramped and cold, and feeling like one in a dream, I rose painfully, and began to roll up the loose sheets or handbills, which I determined to peruse carefully another time. In rolling them up, the date struck my eye, and I perceived they were five-and-twenty years old, and the month and day of the burglary were the very same as this—this, on which these papers had so strangely come rustling to my hand. Struck by this coincidence, I examined them more closely. There were three of them rudely fastened together. The second gave a detailed description of the missing lady, and, as I read of the bright hazel eyes, the long golden-brown hair, the fair complexion, a something intangible brought Miss Mildred's face before me, and I began to wonder what she and Miss Admonitia were like five-and-twenty years ago, when they were young; and who was this fair Alicia? Was she their sister? and if so, why had they never mentioned her?

As if to answer me, a sudden rustle of wind blew over the two upper handbills, turning them back upon my arm, displaying the third, on which, with an increasing horror, I perceived an additional reward was offered for the apprehension of the murderers of Miss Alicia Tremaine, who had insolently deposited her mangled body in a rude coffin at the great doors in the north front of Treval House, on the night of the 21st of January, 1779. The bill went on to relate particulars, but rain-drops fell down on me as I read, and great clouds, gathering from the west, darkened the dull sky with rapidly coming night. I could read no more, and shivering in every limb after my strange

fever, I put the papers in my pocket, and thought of how I should get back to my room.

I walked across the leads to the trap-door, and, kneeling down, tried to lift it. It was fastened from within, and as I tore at it with my nails, there came floating unbidden before my eyes the body of the murdered Miss Alicia, insolently brought to her father's door by her unknown murderers. I chased away the vision as I strove with all my small strength to force open the trap-door. But what were my weak hands against the strong bolts within? I acknowledged at last I was mad to try. There only remained to me to return by the way I had come, but I rejected this alternative instantly. I felt I should go mad or die long before I could creep through those tortuous arched passages beneath the chimneys, or traverse the long dark space between them; and I closed my eyes with a low moan and shudder as I thought of that crouching white horror, with its ghastly face, hovering near me, while some chill voice in my heart seemed to whisper it was Alicia's spirit. Better a thousand times pass the night out here on the roof, in the free air of the autumn sky, than lose my wits or my life down there in that dusty black darkness, with a nameless shape creeping by me!

The warm soft rain of the western November began to fall fast in heavy drops, and the sweeping wind, coming in with a roll of thunder from the Atlantic, whistled around the gothic pile of chimneys, and lingered wistfully in echoes among the tree-tops. Looking down from the roof, I could still see the drenched evergreens drooping dark and heavy beneath the rain, and the long sweep of the smooth lawn, with here and there a black clump of firs, or lighter mass of elm and ash, clothed in that faded autumn leaf which the lightest wind whirls mournfully away. I could still see the shining granite blocks upon the moor, but the sea was hidden by a long, low roll of black clouds, and the wood which stretched away on my left hand to the south was a mass of darkness.

Then it crept and gathered about me, this darkness, and the rain came pouring down drenchingly, till, unable to stand against it, I wrapped my defenceless head in my chintz frock, like Virginia, and clung to the buttress of the chimney for support. As I stood here, bending to the storm, with all my fancies gone, my imagination chilled and dead, I was only a poor, forlorn little child; weeping my supernatural agedness, if I may call it so, all washed out of me by the rain, and the importunities of the flesh crying for warmth and comfort very sharply at my pinched heart.

I think I had two selves—that mysterious, romantic, strange self of which I was sometimes even afraid, which was old, old, old

as the hills, and had traversed a thousand worlds, and was ever trying to make my other self understand its mystic lore, its mighty sorrow; but it spoke in a language that could not be uttered; so my human ears heard, and could not comprehend, and my human tongue vainly tried to interpret, those unknown, awful whisperings. And the other was my childish *new* self, which enjoyed a picture-book, considered thin bread-and-butter a treat, though it preferred jam, and joyously trundled a hoop, though it was thirteen years old.

Alas! this poor little self was very weary now, weeping forlornly against the tall chimneys, chilled, drenched, lonely, and frightened. Suddenly, just as I was thinking there was no hope of release, and I must pass the night in this bleak, high loneliness on the roof—if the great hawks and sea-birds did not carry me away—I saw coming shining up the southern avenue through the wood two glaring globes, like eyeballs of fire. In a moment I knew it was a carriage, and, not stopping to wonder who it was arriving, I crept to the edge of the platform, and as it drew up to the door, I shouted for help with all my might.

A tall gentleman, with iron-gray hair, whom, by the glare of the lamps, I saw alighting from the carriage, was the first to hear me.

In the pouring rain he stood a moment, his upturned face plainly visible to me, as he strove to discover whence the forlorn cry proceeded coming thus strangely out of the darkness. A rush of thoughts came upon upon me—a recollection of that face leaning over my cot, beneath a swinging punkah, and I cried out with all the energy of my soul—

"Father, father, help me! I am dying of cold here at Treval!—shut out!—shut out from every one!—here on the roof!"

But the wind seemed to carry my voice away into the night, and my father's eyes, looking from window to window, saw nothing of the forlorn little figure waving its arms frantically above him.

If I could throw something down, I thought, he would see me.

Then I remembered the great handbills in my pocket, and taking them out and unrolling them, I tore off the topmost one. But it was not heavy enough, so, after a moment's thought, I unclasped my coral necklace, and wound it tightly round and round the paper; then I flung it with all my force beyond the slates.

It fell near my father's feet. He took it up, unwound the coral beads from the hideous packet, and by the light of the lamp read it.

And this was his welcome to Treval.

"My God! whence does this come?"

In the sudden hush of the wind, his words, in all their ghastly horror and pain, fell as

distinctly on my ear as the patter of the rain-drops on the leads.

"I threw it, papa!—your little child—your daughter—here on the roof!"

He looked up, and the small white figure on the dizzy brink of the platform met his eyes, looking dim and ghostly in the night and storm.

"Esther, my child, is it you? Go back, I implore you, go back! Do not come so near the edge! Will they never open the door?" he cried.

But, as he spoke, the servants flung the portals wide, and I had not many moments to wait ere the bolts of the trap-door were drawn aside, and, sobbing, shivering, drenched, I found myself in my father's arms.

## CHAPTER VI.

QUESTIONS rained upon me fast from his trembling lips as he kissed me; but I could answer none. I was really ill; excitement, cold, and terror had prostrated all my powers. I was glad to let myself be put to bed, and then, holding my father's hand as he sat by me, I listened with intense but silent joy as he told me he was come to England on a leave of three years, and had departed so immediately after receiving it that he had reached Treval before the letter sent to announce his arrival had come to our hands. He had that day landed at Falmouth, where he had left my mother too ill and exhausted to come on to Treval without first resting a few hours. But, eager to see his child, he had himself been unable to restrain his impatience, so had driven hither at once. And to-morrow he would send me in Miss Tremaine's carriage to fetch my mother, while he went on to Treganowen to prepare the servants and the house for our arrival.

I fell asleep full of joy with my father's kiss on my cheek, but when I awoke in the morning a strange dull pain possessed my head and limbs. Nevertheless, I was too happy to think much of it. I got up and restlessly helped to pack my trunks, looking away carefully in a little writing-case the two remaining handbills which I had in my pocket. Just as I had finished doing this, Miss Admonitia entered my room and gripped me by the shoulder with her thin white hand.

"Have you any more papers like this one?" she asked in a low, stern voice.

She held in her hand the flaring yellow paper I had flung down at my father's feet. I was ill; my head was dizzy and confused, and I was afraid of Miss Admonitia—afraid, however, with that sort of fear which is a silent antagonism and hatred. To any one else I might have confessed all, but to her,

no; so I answered feverishly and angrily that I had no more papers like that.

My face burned at the untruth, but I tried to console my conscience by saying it was not altogether false, since the bills were certainly not exactly similar.

"Where did you find this one?" asked Miss Admonitia in a kinder tone.

"On the roof," I answered, "beneath the leads, as I was going up there yesterday."

At this moment my father entered the room and joined abruptly in the conversation.

"Do you often go on the leads, Esther?" he said.

"Yes," I answered softly.

"And why do you often go on the leads?" demanded Miss Admonitia in a sharp, suspicious tone.

I gave her no answer till a look from my father repeated the question.

"I go," said I, "because from the roof I can see my home—I can see the towers of Treganowen."

My father instantly put his hand on my head, and spoke in a slightly tremulous voice—

"The servants should not have fastened down the trap-door, when they knew the poor child indulged in this dangerous habit, without first seeing if she was on the roof."

"Depend upon it," said Miss Admonitia, "if I can discover the careless culprit, he or she shall not forget my reprimand."

Here she stooped suddenly and kissed me.

"Poor child! so it was only to see Treganowen you clambered so high."

"Do not scold any one," said I, as I shrank away from her touch; "the door was most likely bolted when I got on the roof."

"But you must have opened it," remarked my father, "to get there."

"No; I crept along under the leads to the northwest corner, and got out of the casement-window on to the roof."

My father looked at Miss Admonitia in amazement, and his eyes flashed with an anger that he seemed anxious yet unable to repress. She met his glance with a slight increase of paleness, and an evident astonishment and vexation at my confession. Indeed, her surprise and uneasiness were so great that the paper which she held concealed under her apron rustled in her trembling hand. I observed she had hidden it there the moment she heard my father's step.

"She risked her life," he said with a shudder, as his troubled glance fell from her to me. "It was not in our compact that she should be killed here in this deadly house. I should have thought," he added in a softer tone, "that you, and Mildred especially, would have cared more for my poor child."

While he spoke, Miss Admonitia's eyes scanned my face with intense anxiety, but it

was not an anxiety for me, and there was something in his reproach that roused a strange fierceness within her.

"And why should Mildred care for your child?" she cried, as she suddenly drew from beneath her silk apron the coarse, flaring, yellow paper with its huge black letters. "Is this the reason why she should care, Colonel Treganowen?"

My father turned frightfully pale, while her own face flushed to that sullen red which my strong emotion brought to her cheek.

"Poor patient martyr," she continued; "innocent, yet constantly accusing herself of crime, while the guilty go unpunished!—is it for that reason or for this"—striking the hideous proclamation with her hand—"that Colonel Treganowen expects Mildred Tremaine to love his child?"

My father held his hand towards her tremblingly, and sank into a chair.

"Oh, Admonitia, do not try me too hard," he murmured.

She looked at him coldly. It was easy to see she was gratified by the pain on his pale face. And some curious instinct told me that if kindness had prompted her at first to hide the terrible paper, it was his reproach respecting me, when she evidently thought some other feeling should be dominant within him, which induced her to show it. Perhaps she revenged her sister.

"Esther," said Miss Admonitia, turning to me, "have you read this thing?"

"Yes," said I, faintly.

"And you have not asked your father who Miss Alicia Tremaine was, for whose recovery this poor gold is offered here?"

"Admonitia, spare me." The words in a faint, low voice, fell from my father's lips like a groan.

She went on remorselessly—

"Esther, Alicia Tremaine was my sister, my most dear and beautiful sister; and she was murdered, and her dead body, disfigured by wounds, by imprisonment, by anguish unutterable, was brought to this house in the dead of night and laid in the north porch. This was five-and-twenty years ago, when your father was a young man, and he loved her dearly."

These last words seemed the cruellest of all, for my father half rose from his chair, and then sank down aghast, almost speechless.

"Admonitia," he gasped forth, "you have no right—Mildred forgave me long ago."

"Mildred is gentle, good, and forgiving as an angel," said Admonitia. And as she spoke of her sister her face softened, the sullen red in her cheeks died out, her lips began to tremble, and coming forward she laid her hand on my father's shoulder.

"Heaven knows, Ralph Treganowen, that I too have forgiven you from my very soul, but there are times when memory is too

strong for me, that is all. Could I help forgiving you when I saw Mildred pardoning all, yet leading the life of a martyr upon earth."

"It is true, it is true," murmured my father, as he took Admonitia's hand. "She is indeed a saint."

But he released her fingers, and shrank away as the paper she held touched him.

"Burn it," he said; "I cannot bear the sight of it."

"And I, then, and Mildred?" asked Miss Admonitia, in a calm tone, which had nevertheless a ring of reproach in it. "Well," she added softly, "let this little one, who is our bond of union, and the link who is to rivet our mutual forgiveness and love, let her burn this wretched relic of the past. Esther, put this in the fire and let it burn to ashes."

I obeyed wonderingly, my father watching me the while with eyes which seemed to look, not at me, but at some phantom of the past, which appeared to him in the flame of the consuming paper.

Then they both kissed me, and bade me be quick and dress, as the carriage would soon be at the door to take me to Falmouth.

"Mind you wish Miss Mildred good-by kindly and affectionately," whispered my father, as he lingered a moment after Miss Admonitia left the room.

Had he, then, instinctively guessed that I did not like Miss Mildred?

I was full of wonder at the strange words I had heard, but I dared not ask a question. My father was still such a stranger to me, and I to him, that I felt the time was not yet come for mutual confidence. Moreover, the newness of being with him, and the expectancy and delight of my coming interview with my mother, so filled my mind that curiosity was less on the stretch respecting other things, and even the adventure of yesterday faded away dimly before all my new joys.

## CHAPTER VII.

NEVERTHELESS, when dressed to depart, I knocked softly at Miss Mildred's door, the recollection of my timid knock the day previous bounded back hotly on me, with first the flush and then the chill of fever; but somehow I felt so much older to-day, that I smiled to myself at my childish superstition, just as we smile at a nightmare vanished.

Mildred did not say this time, "What do you want?" In the silver clear tones peculiar to her, she simply bade me "Come in."

Here was a bright room, so warm, so comfortable, so little mysterious in its aspect, that I smiled again at yesterday's thoughts; and here, seated by the window,

working for the poor, was the pale, fragile, unearthly lady whom all the household loved so well.

Were any sick, then Miss Mildred tended them; were any sorrowful, then Miss Mildred comforted them; were any stricken with remorse, and writhing in the thought of unforgiven sin, then Miss Mildred fasted and prayed for them.

She held out her thin, white transparent hand, through which one could see the light, and drew me gently towards her.

"You were frightened yesterday," she said, "my poor little Esther."

My heart beat with a sudden bound, and I looked at her with a terrified glance. I half thought she knew what I had seen, and I felt a horror, a fear of her knowing it beyond the power of words to tell. A moment more reassured me.

"It must have been very terrible to find yourself shut out on the leads, my love. You were glad you had something to throw down at your father's feet, were you not?"

"Yes, I was glad," said I, uneasily.

Miss Mildred detected this feeling in me instantly.

"It was not your fault," she said, "that it was that dreadful proclamation—that was God's doing."

She closed her eyes, and pressing her thin, small palms together, seemed absorbed a moment in prayer. For some reason, to-day I saw she liked me better than she had ever done yet, but I only grew more uneasy under her new affection.

"God's doing," she murmured, as she leant back in her chair, her large eyes still closed. "And He chooses the child for an instrument."

"Esther," she said aloud, "it was strange yesterday you should have got on the roof by the window, as Admonitia tells me you did"—she put her arm around me here, and shuddered with a sincere feeling for my danger—"stranger still you should have found that hideous advertisement of the horror in our family which we have always kept secret from you, and strangest of all"—here she stooped and kissed me—"that you should have flung it down at your father's feet to welcome him to Treval."

I writhed a little, and tried to free myself from her embrace, but she held me firmly.

"Esther, when you first came to us, a little child of six, I knew you would hear ghastly stories enough; in this corner of the world the people are too fond of them, and I forbade them to add this frightful history to their list. I knew the servants would obey me, so I had no fear of its reaching you to scare you in your sleep and play, or in your wanderings about our old mansion—little explorer, is there a single corner of it which you do not know? But Admonitia and I intended, when you were old enough, to give you the sad details our-

selves. We were bound by a promise to your father not to do this without his permission, but there was a period fixed for his giving it; and mine were to be the lips to tell the tale—that was his part of the compact, and he owed it to me. The knowledge of my sister's murder has come to you prematurely, through no fault of ours, but I abetain from giving you her story, because this promise still binds me. Nevertheless, I release him from his. Tell your father from me that he has my permission to relate Alicia Tremaine's history to you when he thinks fit, and—yes—say he may speak of me as he thinks fit also."

She paused and covered her face with her hands, but they were so emaciated and small, that through the thin fingers I saw the working of her lips and the ghastly pallor of her ashy cheeks. She strove with herself, and seemed to grow calm suddenly as a slight noise in the bedroom within attracted her attention. She listened to it with a bright light growing into her eyes, which looked like devilry to my childish fancy, but which was only the glow of devotion, for her lips were murmuring in prayer.

"Esther," she said again—and her small silken hand rested on my head—"if your father says that I was a proud, passionate, capricious girl, full of contempt for others, yet naturally envious and jealous, let me humbly confess that it is true. If he says that my sister Alicia was beautiful, good, and self-sacrificing as only divine natures are, let me humbly say again that it is true. If he adds that he loved Alicia with his whole heart, while he hated me with a bitter and cruel loathing, then pity me, Esther, with all your young soul pity me, for my wedding-day was fixed, and I was to have been his wife on the very morning that my sister's murder made me what you see me now."

Her soft silken hand sank from my hair to my neck, and her bent head fell forward on my shoulder, while her whole frame shook with anguish.

"If," she said, as her emaciated fingers, clasping me tightly, seemed to burn into my flesh—"if years of penance, of prayer, of fasting can atone for the pride and cruelty of my youth, then surely God will show me mercy. Oh, Esther! perhaps you are happy because you have no sister to torment you into sin."

At this moment the door of the bedroom suddenly opened, and the old servant, Martha, came out.

"Miss Mildred," she said reproachfully, "why will you be forever accusing yourself of evils you could not hinder? If you are self-reproachful, what then, ought others to be? You have led the life of a martyr, while other folks have enjoyed the world pretty well, I believe."

She glanced at me as she spoke, and I knew she meant my father.

Miss Mildred answered Martha's speech by a faint smile; then, repressing any mark of agitation, she rose and took me by the hand.

"You are going to leave me, Esther. Come into my room and choose something from my trinkets for a keepsake. Take care of the steps."

This was the first time I had ever been invited to enter Miss Mildred's room, and my eyes wandered around it with a vivid, inexplicable curiosity. I had an involuntary expectation of seeing something wonderful, and I felt a disappointment and sort of surprise at the ordinary, every-day aspect of this mysterious chamber. A neat little room, beautifully white and simple, a modern bed with long snowy muslin curtains, a carpet of pure green, sprinkled with white rose-buds, a large wardrobe of walnut-wood, a white toilet service on a marble slab, and this was all, with the exception of a closed cupboard or closet in the wall.

Looking up, I perceived Mildred was watching my examination of her room with a sort of amusement on her pale face.

"There are no skeletons in the closet, Esther," she said, with a sad smile. "The great skeleton of our house you discovered yesterday on the roof. You need not look so red and frightened, my child; I am glad myself that fate disclosed that history to you on the very day that your father came. Now go and look in the closet if you like, and in the wardrobe too. I perceive this is a sort of Bluebeard chamber for you."

She opened the closet-door as she spoke, and I certainly wondered a little as I saw it was fitted up almost like a pantry or kitchen. Here were saucepans, a tea-kettle, dishes, and cups, all in exquisite cleanliness and order, and a good fire burned briskly in a little stove.

"You see now," she said, "how it is Ady and I trouble the servants so little. When we want tea, or coffee, or broth, Martha gets it for us without descending to the remote kitchen, which is certainly a quarter of a mile from this unfrequented portion of the house. And then she washes our plates and cups here. Indeed, I would not trust them out of my room into any other servant's hands. All that set of china was given me by your grandfather, Esther."

She sighed deeply, and shut the door of this inner room, which perhaps was once a dressing-closet; then, turning to the wardrobe, she opened both the carved leaves and took from the upper shelf a casket of silver filigree, lined with blue velvet—faded now—and securely locked; the key, enamelled and jewelled, was hanging to her watch.

On the top of the casket, on a scroll of frosted silver, were the initials M. S. T., formed of turquoise; but inside, wrought

on the blue velvet in seed-pearls, I read the words—

"Mildred! Salome Treganowen. From her husband, Ralph Treganowen."

"Did my father give you this?" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"Yes," answered Mildred in her soft, sad voice. "The morning on which my sister was missed, I have told you, was to have been our wedding-day. Some think the jewels in this casket were the bait which drew the murderers here. It may have been so, but they took plenty besides this," she said, laying her hand on the box.

"Did they take this?" I cried. "Then how is it you have it now?"

"It was sent back to me in my sister's rough coffin; it was the pillow on which they laid her poor head."

I started back and removed my hand from the soft velvet with an exclamation of horror.

"All the jewels were in it intact," continued Mildred; "but they were nothing to me, to my father, to Admonitia. There they lie, Esther, all tarnished, and untouched since that dreadful day; here is the reason why the box is dear to me."

She removed the inner lining of the wadded velvet, and between this and the outer covering lay a piece of faded yellow paper.

"Read it, Esther," said Mildred.

I stooped down, and with difficulty made out the faded words:

"Forgive me, Mildred, all the past. My wretched life is no longer an obstacle to your happiness. Ralph will return to you, now I am gone. I have left you to him as my last legacy. I send you back your bridal jewels; array yourself in them joyously for your wedding, Mildred, and let no thought of terrible fate disturb your peace. I have bought back your diamonds by a promise to him that all further pursuit shall now cease. Bid my father respect my promise as he would the request of one already dead. And so farewell, and may God bless you all, my dear ones! My last words as I die will be a cry to my father for forgiveness.

"Your wretched imprisoned sister,

"ALICIA."

I felt the blood forsake my cheeks as I read these lines, written, doubtless, a few hours, or perhaps minutes, before the unfortunate writer—who evidently anticipated her doom—was murdered.

"I cannot take any thing from that box," said I, pushing it away. Then I laid my hand on Miss Mildred's arm. "And were your sister's murderers never discovered?" I asked.

"Never," she answered in a faint, hollow voice, her eyes as she spoke looking fixed and unnatural, as they gazed seemingly at some sight I could not see. Then turning to the casket with evident repugnance, she

replaced the velvet lining and closed the cover over the glittering contents.

"Esther," she said, "you are like your father—given to superstition. He has constantly refused to receive these jewels, though since I declined to be his wife they are certainly his, not mine. But he looks upon them as the price of blood; his idea being that Alicia was carried away by the robbers as a sort of hostage to insure their own safety. And he fancies she must have rashly persuaded one of the band to restore these jewels, or perhaps secrete them for that purpose, and this so enraged the rest that in their fury they murdered her."

"And do you think so?" said I.

Miss Mildred shook her head mournfully.

"If she was murdered for the jewels, why did they send them back?"

Then, in her clear, sad voice, she continued to speak as to herself, musingly:

"If I could think as your father does, that she was taken away by force, then I might believe she and her captors had some deadly quarrel over this poor casket; but what if she went *willingly*? what if the whole robbery was planned by her, and it was she who admitted the thieves?"

"Miss Mildred!" I exclaimed, in intense astonishment, "are you mad?"

"Esther, I forget," she answered hurriedly, "that you do not know all this sad story, and cannot therefore, understand my reasons for this suspicion, and it is not for me to tell you the tale. Let your father tell it, at his own time and in his own way. Now," she added, in another tone, "we will choose this important keepsake. What do you say to this Indian scarf, since you will not have jewels, or this carved fan, or this agate box, Esther?"

She took each thing from a drawer as she spoke, and held it up to me.

The box possessed on the lid a portrait of Marie Antoinette as dauphiness, so I chose this eagerly, and thanked her with the warmest kiss that had ever yet passed from my lips to Miss Mildred's thin cheek. For some subtle reason I understood her and liked her better to-day than I had ever yet done.

This secret of her sister's murder, which I felt now had ever been floating around me since I entered Treval—coming sometimes near in whispered talk of servants, waning away in Miss Admonitia's reserve, yet approaching me again through Mildred's wan cheeks—ever within my grasp, and yet untouched, till at last it reaches me through the hands, as it appeared to me, of a spirit—well, this secret once told, the invisible barrier between me and the sisters was down, and I felt now that if I stayed at Treval I should be welcomed to their sitting-room with a look and a smile different from the unnatural serenity, or frozen guardedness I had hitherto known.

Miss Mildred wrapped the little agate box in a handkerchief trimmed with Mechlin lace, and put it in my hand.

"Now, Esther," she said, "we'll go back to the sitting-room, unless there is any thing else you would like to see among my curiosities."

I looked round the room lingeringly, and it was then I espied a tall pile of trunks in one corner, ready corded.

"Are you going with us to Treganowen?" I cried, astonished.

"I was going there when those boxes were packed," said Miss Mildred, and her voice sounded like a dreary echo; "but neither they nor I will ever make that journey now. Go and look at them, Esther."

I went, and then saw their coverings were faded and worn, their cords in some places broken, and they all bore, in spite of the extreme care with which it was evident they were brushed and dusted, that curious look of age and pain which things laid by invariably acquire, as if they gathered to them all the ghastly thoughts of death and decay which every-day life sweeps from the heart.

These boxes all bore, on a small brass plate, this address:

MRS. RALPH TREGANOWEN,

TREGANOWEN TOWERS.

I looked at Miss Mildred, and before she spoke, I knew by the shade of increased paleness on her ashy cheeks that these coffins—how can I call them by any other name?—of her wedding outfit had remained unopened since the dreadful day of her sister's disappearance.

"Martha and I sat up very late on the 16th of November, five-and-twenty years ago, to finish the packing of these boxes, Esther. You see there is only one left unlocked and unopened. It is the one in which my wedding-dress was to have been put after the ceremony. Come away, my dear; they are but a sad folly to look at now. I have piled them up there like a monument sacred to the memory of my dead youth and my murdered sister. I never meant to get eccentric about them, but in the agony of Alicia's disappearance they were unthought of. Then came her death and its long horror, and mourning, and still they remained there untouched; till at last it seemed like sacrilege to remove them. When you grow older, Esther, you will understand the superstition of the heart which gathers round any accustomed relics, making household gods of them, and shrinking painfully from their displacement or the sacrilege of a stranger's unthinking touch. It is this feeling which, coming gradually upon me through a terrible ordeal of anguish, made these mementoes sacred, and



pardon my eccentric tenderness for them. And here let me explain, my dear, that in this little fully of mine you behold the reason why you have never hitherto entered this room. Admonitia and I thought you would ask questions which we could not answer when you observed these boxes addressed, as you would suppose, to your mother. Once more, Esther, mind the steps! Any one coming from our sitting-room fancies this is on the same level, and many a stranger has had a fall over these steps; but you perceive this floor is much lower, owing to the library having been heightened when my great-grandfather made the alterations in this front."

"The steps are ugly," said I; "they and the pile of old boxes spoil your pretty room. At least you should carpet these little cramped stairs."

"And where would Martha's occupation be?" said Miss Mildred with a little laugh, which sounded curiously from her, she laughed so rarely. "She delights in polishing them to a most dangerous slipperiness, obliging me to say to every one, as I did to you, 'Mind the steps.'"

## CHAPTER VIII.

We entered the sitting-room as she spoke, and found Martha laying out a little round table by the fire, with fruit, wine, and cake.

"What are you doing this for, Martha?" asked Mildred.

"You and Miss Esther will have a long drive to Falmouth," said Martha, "so you must take something before you go. The landau is coming round at twelve; it's long past eleven, now, and—oh, Miss Mildred, why, you are not dressed!"

"Martha, we argued that matter last night," said Mildred, in the coldest of her clear tones. "I am not going. Admonitia is dressing to accompany Esther."

"You, Miss Mildred, an angel in all else, is it possible you—?"

But a knock at the door stopped Martha's speech. It was Timothy Pryor, with a bunch of flowers in his hand, and a note.

"From the colonel, madam," said Timothy; "he is going to Treganowen, and he hopes he shall have the pleasure of seeing you there this evening."

"Thank you," said Mildred. "Put the nosegay on the table, Timothy."

The strange, desolate ring in her clear, soft voice made me look at her face. It was not whiter than usual—I doubt if any thing could make it whiter—but it was more terrible, more unearthly in its aspect than I had ever seen it before. Any less white face could never look with the ghastly wofulness that hers looked.

"Why does he send me flowers? why send me letters?" she cried passionately, as the heavy door closed after Timothy.

"Miss Mildred!" exclaimed Martha; and I saw the tears well into her eyes as she looked at her mistress.

"Take the flowers away," said Mildred, shudderingly, but in a more gentle tone. "Put them in there, my good Martha"—she pointed to the bedroom door—"add them to his other gifts; it is fit they should be together."

"Had I not better wait a little?" said Martha, soothingly; but she glanced at me as she spoke.

"No, no!" answered Mildred, smoothing my hair with her hand. "Esther shall drink her wine, and read her father's letter for me, while you arrange my nosegay, Martha."

The old servant obeyed, but with a strange look of dislike in her face, and when she shut the bedroom door I certainly heard her turn the lock.

"Martha is determined we shall not disturb her as she arranges the flowers," said Mildred, smiling, as she poured out some wine for me.

But I saw, nevertheless, that she was vexed at the act, and perhaps felt it as an impertinence.

"Now, Esther, read the letter. Your father's writing tries my eyes too much. I have not looked at it these twenty years."

"Do you think I may read it?" said I, as I took the note up timidly. "Will not papa be angry?"

"I will promise you he shall not. It is only one of his blind invitations to stay with him and his wife, and—oh, Esther, I cannot read it!"

When Miss Mildred's voice broke from its usual calm, there was a pathos, a beauty, an anguish in it indescribable, that spoke to the heart in accents irresistible, wringing from it such pity, such sympathy, that one's whole nature fell prostrate before the spell, softened into implicit obedience to the desolate suffering that spoke in such a tone.

I read the letter without another word—

"DEAREST MILDRED—Let my second return to England after an absence of so many years be happier than the first. Let me see you, and hear the assurance from your own lips that you forgive the past. God knows my innocence, and how little I could anticipate that an involuntary change of feeling—for which I could never account, and to which I never yielded—should prove the deadly source from which should spring such dire events. Mildred, in return for the anguish my hand drew upon you, I offered you, I gave you, my life. I would have lived a hermit for your sake; but when you wished me to marry, I obeyed; when you asked me for my child, I obeyed. Esther is yours—"

I started, and looked into Miss Mildred's deep gray eyes in some consternation. She

smiled back into my face with a kind, sad smile.

"Do not fear, Esther," she said, "You see he takes back his gift to-day. Go on."

I went on in a lower tone, and my voice trembled—

"And if I restore her to her mother to-day, in that also I obey you, and none the less will her future fate be in your hands. Until you say 'Speak,' I will be silent, both to her mother and herself. She shall never hear the name of him—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Mildred, hurriedly.

But, although my voice obeyed her, my eyes, rapidly glancing down the page, continued to read these words:—

"—to whom we destine her; she shall never see him till *you* choose. The time, the place, and the marriage itself, depend entirely on your will. I look on Esther as absolutely yours. As to—"

But at this moment Mildred took the letter from my hand, and turned the page abruptly. She had crept round behind me so softly that I had not heard her, and I screamed as she touched me.

"You are a very sensitive, nervous child, Esther," said Mildred, while her trembling hand, which clasped my father's letter with a repugnant shudder, attested to her own nervous and perilous temperament. "Yours will be a passionate nature when you are a woman. And you have an imagination glowing and dangerous as a volcano. If any suffering comes upon you, Esther, it will eat at your brain and heart like a fire; perhaps you would go mad."

She looked at me with a curious, deep, cold scrutiny that brought a shudder over my whole frame. My hands trembled, and my cheeks flushed to burning at her words. I felt she spoke the truth, and the mysterious allusion to me in my father's letter was already doing its work.

"You should conquer your imagination," pursued Mildred, "or one day you will find it your cruellest enemy. If I had known the secret intention of your father and myself was named in this letter, I would not have put it into your hands. I thought it was merely one of his stupid invitations to Treganowen. As if I were made of stone or wood, like himself," she broke out abruptly, "and could pass through fire unscathed, or as if I could let him see me writhing in the flame! God help me! there are fiends of love and hate in some hearts, but the blind who rouse them stand by at their deadly struggle and never see it!"

She stopped suddenly, and walked up and down the room, turning her face from my gaze. But in a moment or two, calm and quiet as ever, she came to me, and laid her sicken hand again on my shoulder.

"Esther, I cannot explain the letter; but you are a sensible girl, you will not allow it to dwell morbidly in your mind, or excite

your feelings. Do not speak of this matter to your father; you would distress him. I am obliged to let you finish his note, that you may see how much you would distress him. Now read on this page."

I had been so accustomed to obey Miss Mildred that I did so now, although something in my nature revolted against the command, and my blood was coursing with the recurring heat and chill of fever through my veins.

The page contained these words—

"—will never hear of her existence till permitted by you. This is much to exact of a father, but I owe you much, and therefore I obey you. In return I only ask that you will see me, and give me your hand in kindness; then, and then only, shall I think you mean well to my child. Yes, I ask one thing more; do not break my heart by letting Esther know there is any secret, any mystery between you and me. I could not bear the child's innocent questions; they would kill me.

"Come to Treganowen with Esther and my wife, if you are my friend. Accept some kindness from me, and let me help you, dear Mildred, to fling off forever this morbid and passionate clinging to past memories which ought long ago to have been buried in poor Alicia's grave."

This was all, save the signature.

"Fling off past memories!" It is easy for him to say so," repeated Mildred, in her most desolate voice. "He does not know how much I spare him. He is not haunted as I am; no one tells him that my sister's shadow—her horrible, creeping, hideous shadow—is ever near me. I have only to turn to see it when I will. Fling it off! O God! what would I not give to fling it off forever! Hurry it in her grave! Ah, why could it not rest there?"

She hid her face in her hands, and her emaciated, shadowy frame shook as with some indescribable horror. By an inexplicable sympathy I knew that at that moment in her imagination, as in mine the same ghastly figure was visible—the crouching, creeping terror of the roof groping through her mind darkly, as through mine.

"Oh, Miss Mildred!" I said, touching her pityingly; and at that moment I should have spoken of what I had seen, but a hand turned the lock, and Admonitia entered.

"The carriage is at the door," she said cheerfully, "and I am waiting for you, Esther."

"Admonitia," said Miss Mildred—and she laid her hand, still slightly trembling from her late emotion, on her sister's arm—"look; I have inadvertently let the child read this letter. What is to be done?"

Miss Tremaine ran it through rapidly, and then glanced anxiously at her sister.

"If you are not sorry," she said, "let me

confess that I am glad. Esther, were you surprised to find—?"

"Admonitia," exclaimed Mildred, hurriedly, "she did not read that page. Look; it was only this she saw."

They whispered together for a moment in the window, and then Admonitia turned towards me kindly.

"My dear," she said, "you have read enough of this letter to perceive there is a secret between Colonel Treganowen and Mildred; but it would grieve your father deeply if he were aware you knew this. Try, then, to bear it, even if it vexes you, and, above all, do not ask questions. You see he says that would kill him. I am treating you like a woman, Esther, in speaking thus. Many women have had to bear secrets all their life long, and they have died courageously rather than betray them. I am grieved to burden your young mind with even a shadow; but it cannot be helped now. It is, in reality, a nothing—a mere nothing. But a father's will should be law to a child, otherwise I would tell you at once what this is. In fact, it is a business matter, my dear, having to do with money, and it is entirely beyond a child's comprehension."

This speech did not deceive me, and perhaps Miss Tremaine felt this, for she said impatiently—

"Now wish Mildred good-by, and let us go."

Mildred kissed me on the lips without a word, and then went slowly back to the window. On her haggard white cheeks there burnt two fevered spots of red. Admonitia gazed on her anxiously.

"Why will you not take a little wine?" she said impatiently. "You are ill."

Mildred shook her head, and fixed her eyes on the letter, which she still held in her hand.

Martha at this moment coming from the bedroom, observed her, and exchanged a glance with Admonitia; then she took the letter from Mildred's passive fingers.

"Ah, yes, my good Martha," she said abstractedly, "put it with my flowers; let it be where the dead live; it is fit they should be together." Then looking up, a ghastly change passed over her face. It was as if something had broken loose which she kept chained within her; and with a wild cry that that was her fitting posture, and God had punished the innocent for the guilty, she suddenly fell to the floor in the crouching and terrible attitude so distinctly impressed on my brain.

Before rushing to her aid, her sister waved me from the room. Frightened, I obeyed: and it was some minutes before Miss Admonitia, the sullen red hot on her cheeks, joined me. We got into the carriage silently, and it was not until we had driven out of the park that she spoke.

"Esther," she said, "Mildred thinks she has sinned in showing you that letter. And now she will fast and pray, and increase her sufferings till she brings herself to death's door. She will deprive herself of sleep, and food, and comfort. Think of this sometimes when you are playing, or eating, or drinking, or laying your head on your warm pillow. Think then of Mildred fasting and watching in some lone room of that desolate home, to which a man's fickleness brought such misery twenty-five years ago, and for her sake keep this foolish secret that we ask you. And remember, it is your father's secret, not your mother's; and you have no right to hint it even to her without his consent."

"I will remember," I faltered, "I promise you."

"Very well," said Admonitia, relapsing into her cold manner; "I shall tell Mildred I have your word."

She did not speak again till we alighted at Falmouth. Can you wonder that when I entered my mother's presence my cheeks were burning and my hands cold, while my whole manner was embarrassed, and awkward, and frightened?

## CHAPTER IX.

A LAZARUS lady, pale, and very pretty, lying on a sofa, held out her hand to me as I entered, without opening her eyes.

"Is it you, my dear?" she said. "I thought—"

"It is Esther," said Miss Tremaine, hastening forward. "My dear, embrace your mother."

My mother rose, with some curiosity in her pale blue orbs, and, holding me by the hand, scrutinized me earnestly.

"She is very small for her age," she said in a disappointed tone, "and not nearly so pretty—"

"As you expected," interrupted Miss Admonitia. "Never mind; beauty will come to her, depend on it. You are as pretty as ever, Mrs. Treganowen. The belle of Penrhyn, Lucy Polwhele, would still be the belle, even if her fortune yet remained to be made."

"I don't think so," said my mother, a little peevishly, as she shook hands with Miss Admonitia as we shake hands with an old friend. "The climate has sadly changed me. Ah!" she added, with a deep sigh, "when your sister took me over Treganowen Towers, and asked me what I'd give to be mistress of it, had I known all I should have to go through, I'm sure I never would have made the ridiculous bargain with her that—"

"But having made it," interposed Miss Admonitia.

"Oh, of course I have no alternative but to submit," said my mother. "You need not be afraid of my objecting; the colonel won't let me speak on the subject. I'm sure, if I had known his gloomy, tyrannical—"

"Esther, my dear," interrupted Miss Tremaine, "run and ask Pryor for my muff; I've left it in the carriage."

I went, and tears of pain and disappointment started to my eyes. This was my mother, of whom I had dreamed tenderly a thousand times! for whose kiss, for whose love, my heart had yearned so warmly through my lonely childhood! and I could see already that her only feeling towards me merged fast from indifference into dislike.

I lingered long on my errand, swallowing my bitter grief. When I came back Miss Admonitia was speaking in a sharp voice.

"I insist on your being more cautious, Lucy." I heard her say as I turned the handle of the door, "or Paul—"

"There, there!" said my mother, in an injured tone, as I came forward, "I understand—he's to be unchained, and let loose upon me for my punishment, I suppose! I dreaded coming to England because of that man! You need not threaten me with him. I'm sure I don't know why I was ever born."

She buried her face in her handkerchief and began to cry; but Miss Admonitia taking no notice of this, she, after a time, wiped her tears, and spoke in a deprecating voice—

"Miss Tremaine. I hope you will make allowances for my fatigue and excitement. I know you are my best friend, and have always proved yourself so. What should I have done at that dreadful time of my life if you had not helped me? What would have become of me when I was left an orphan but for you? Believe me, I do not forget these things, and I am not so foolish as you think. You may rely upon me for the future, indeed you may!"

"I am glad, Lucy, my dear," said Miss Admonitia, holding out her hand, "that your good sense is come back to you, and that you do me and Mildred justice. But do not call me your friend; all the kindness we may have shown you emanated from her. It is to her you owe your marriage and all your good fortune. You know her power over Colonel Treganowen, and no sooner were you arrived in India than, as you will remember, she accomplished all she had promised you respecting him."

"I remember," replied my mother, shrugging her pretty shoulders a little. "If Mildred were young it would be enough to make one jealous."

"Lucy!" exclaimed Miss Admonitia, in her sternest voice, "it is only such a woman as you who could use the word jealousy in connection with Mildred. Good heavens!

to think of her, and remember all her self-denial and patience! her devotion and charity, her long life of prayer and seclusion—a life that you and such as you could never understand—and then to hear such a word as jealousy applied to her by a pretty piece of empty frippery! And you know that your husband has never seen her face for twenty-two years—never, in fact, since that time, three years after Alicia's death, when he returned to Mildred to implore her forgiveness, and to beg that their marriage, then so fearfully hindered, might now take place. She refused his prayer, and that was the last time they met, Mrs. Treganowen."

Instead of being angry at the harsh voice, the cruelly frank speech, of her friend, my mother only looked frightened and repentant.

"I was but jesting," she said, humbly.

"Is Mildred Tremaine a fit subject for a jest?" asked Miss Admonitia, while the flush of anger rose higher on her brow.

"It is useless to be cross with me," said my mother. "You ought never to mind any thing I say. I am neither clever like you, nor good like Miss Mildred. I am stupid, and I always shall be stupid, and I say stupid things. I remember now the colonel has often told me Miss Mildred never sees him when he goes to Treval. He is distressed at her persistent refusal to meet him; he has a gloomy, superstitious idea that she harbors thoughts of hatred and revenge, and he will never feel at peace till he hears his pardon from her own lips."

Miss Admonitia looked at my mother earnestly, but answered her in a kind tone—

"Another wrong done to Mildred: she forgave him years ago. Here is a note for him from her; and here is something for you, which she sends you. Truly, she understands you better than I do. I will try to copy her, and never be angry again with Lucy Treganowen."

Miss Admonitia drew from her bag, as she spoke, a morocco case, which inclosed a costly gold bracelet set with rubies. On receiving it, my mother, with surprising energy, started from the sofa and ran to the window to examine it. She was in an ecstasy of delight; her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed, and a hundred pretty words of praise and thanks fell from her lips. All her languor vanished; she was so changed and pleasant, and appeared to love Miss Mildred so much, that I longed to have something to give her also. I thought of the agate box, but, reflecting it was a keepsake, I felt I could not give it away. Then I remembered joyfully a large, old-fashioned pearl brooch, or pin, given me long ago by a gentleman who had come to see the state rooms at Treval, and who had conquered my repugnance to his questions and caresses by this gift. I drew the pin now from my tip-pet, and offered it mildly to my mother.

"What is it, child?" she said, stooping towards me to look at it.

"It is a brooch with a long pin, mamma, that a gentleman gave me. Will you have it? Oh, do take it!—please do take it! I want to give it to you, and I wish it was prettier," said I earnestly, with tears of yearning in my eyes as I looked towards her, longing for a word of love.

My mother stooped again, kissed me kindly, and patted me on the cheek.

"What a curious thin little creature you are, Esther!" she said; "and you were plump as a cherub when you left India."

Then she turned to Miss Admonitia—

"Look here; what an antique bit of jewelry this is. Do you think it is worth any thing?"

Miss Tremaine took it in her hand, and I saw by the sudden change in her face that something was the matter.

"In what room at Treval did you find this, Esther?" she asked, with a singular inflection of voice.

A little frightened, I repeated my statement hesitatingly.

"When did the gentleman come?—how long ago?"

And Miss Admonitia spoke sharply now.

"In the summer, just before we went to St. Columb, where I used to make such great sand castles, like Treganowen Towers, at Bedruthan Steps."

"That was four years ago," she answered thoughtfully. "Then how is it I have never seen this before, Esther?"

"I pinned on my doll's cloak with it," said I; "but I did not take my doll to St. Columb, and after I came back from playing with those great rocks at Bedruthan I could not play with dolls any more. I put my playthings away, and this morning, when Sarah and I were packing, I took them from the box where they were, and gave them to her for her little brother, except the brooch, which I found on the doll's cloak, just where I had put it before I went to St. Columb."

"It is very strange," said Miss Admonitia, in a low voice; "but this is one of the jewels stolen on that terrible night."

"No, no!—it can't be!" replied my mother, holding out her hand for it. "The child says a gentleman gave it to her."

"This brooch was my grandfather's," answered Miss Tremaine, in a voice that would not admit of contradiction. "Lucy, you know the portrait of the first Lady Tremaine at Treval. Well, do you recognize her here?"

She touched a spring, which opened the brooch, and displayed within the miniature of a lady in the dress of Queen Anne's time.

"The Cornish gentry were nearly all Jacobites, but my grandfather was a very active partisan of the Hanoverian line, and received a baronetcy from George the First

as his reward. This picture was taken just after he got the title, else the Bloody Hand would not disfigure the portrait in this tasteless way. Here, too, is Lady Tremaine's cipher—A. M. T.—Admonitia Mildred Tremaine. Are you convinced, Lucy?"

My mother was convinced, but not pleased. She pouted sullenly, while Admonitia continued thoughtfully to examine the brooch, which was large and clumsily manufactured.

"Esther," she said suddenly, "should you know the man again who gave you this?"

I shut my eyes, and called up before me the handsome but repelling face of the man who had seized me with such a hot, strong hand, and, compelling me to sit for a moment on his knee, had endeavored to conquer my repugnance to his touch by fastening this brooch in my white tippet.

"I should know him again anywhere," I said decidedly.

Miss Admonitia looked at me with earnest thoughtfulness.

"I believe you will," she said. "Lucy, Esther never forgets any one she has once seen, or any thing she has heard. She is well named Esther—Secret—for she is the most secret, silent little creature that ever existed."

"I am sorry to hear it," responded my mother. "I hate such dispositions!"

Miss Admonitia took no notice of this speech.

"When I get home," she continued, "I'll show this pin to Mildred, and we'll look over the list of the articles stolen. I know it is fully described there, and I'll copy out the description for you. I'll examine, too, the visitors' book for that year, and discover, if I can, what name this gentleman gave himself."

"What nonsense!" answered my mother, peevishly. "All the things have changed hands a hundred times in twenty-five years. Doubtless the gentleman bought the brooch honestly enough."

"Perhaps he did; but that is no reason why I should not try to find out how and where he bought it."

"I'm sure I would lose all the jewels that ever glittered," said my mother, with increased ill-humor, "rather than I'd rake up an affair that caused so much scandal and so many false surmises in its time."

Miss Admonitia's face turned of a deeper, more sullen red than I had ever seen it yet. She seemed about to speak angrily, but checked herself by a great effort, and there was a moment of deep, painful silence before her sad voice broke in softly—

"You are right, Lucy; and although, God knows! I would give my life to discover my sister's murderer, yet on such a slight clue as this it would be wrong to stir up the past. Esther, my dear, you must not be deprived of the pleasure of making your mamma a present. I will give you ten guineas for this

brooch; I have no right else to take it from you. Now go and present them to your mother, unless she would prefer that we choose something for her at the jeweller's here."

My mother half-ashamed, made some demur at first, but with no sincere resistance, for she ended by accepting the ten guineas, saying, with a blush, she thought the little shops of Falmouth could possess nothing worth buying.

After this she asked languidly for lunch, or "tiffin," as she called it. When it came she found every thing detestable; nevertheless, she ate with a good appetite, and then we started in Miss Tremaine's carriage for Treganowen.

## CHAPTER X.

At the great oak door, the grand entrance at Treganowen, my father met us, and I remember I felt proud of his manly figure and handsome face, and perfect courtesy as he received us. He kissed me as I descended last from the carriage, and there was a trembling softness and tenderness in his voice which spoke to my heart, overflowing it with a flood of joy and gratitude as I felt the comforting assurance that here at least I was loved, here I should not crave for bread and receive a stone.

My mother, saying she was tired to death, flung herself on a couch in the drawing-room placed opposite a blazing fire. Here she was divested of her hat and numerous cloaks by no less than three servants, who attended with assiduous devotion to her wants.

Miss Admontia and my father paced up and down the terrace in earnest conversation, but in a few minutes I was surprised to see her re-enter her carriage and drive off.

"Surely," I thought, "she might have wished me good-by. I have lived with her for seven years, yet she is gone without a word."

Habit is a link which cannot be broken without a pang, even if no love entwine it. As I watched the departing carriage I felt my heart tighten, and, like the prisoner too late set free who pines for his cell, I longed painfully to be back again in one of my sweetest loneliest haunts at Treval. There was no peace, no loneliness here. The house was full of servants, some of them Indians, who looked cold and strangely forlorn, while the others regarded them evidently with a superstitious dislike. Jostling each other on the stairs and passages, retreating and talking, in every room arranging and unpacking newly-arrived luggage and furniture, these numerous retainers appeared to me only to add to the confusion and discomfort that reigned everywhere.

Lonely, in an empty upper room, I leaned against the window-sill, letting the anxious tears roll slowly over my cheeks as I felt myself a stranger and an intruder in my own home. No one asked for me, no one disturbed me, till at last two or three men, and a brisk servant girl with a red face and an impertinent nose, entered in furious haste.

"La, miss," she cried, starting back as she saw me, "you must go away, please; we wants to put the carpet down here."

"Where am I to go?" said I, forlornly.

"Where arree to go?" repeated the girl; "I don't know, not I, but there's rooms enough in this wisht oold place for a young lady to sit in, without biding here to hender workpeople."

I departed without another word, and wandered desolately through the house, peeping into rooms where strange servants were eating and drinking, where strange men had jugs of beer upon beds, and bread and cheese on the backs of mirrors laid flat; where dirty, over-tired men were sitting on piles of carpets, and gossiping women of a slatternly aspect and wondrous volubility of tongue, belonging unmistakably to the chattering tribe, stood chattering, pilfering, working.

All this was such a contrast to quiet, orderly, stately Treval, that my nerves felt rasped, and I shrank away frightened. I was a child of reckless hardihood in some things, yet timid and shy to painfulness in others. Above all, I dreaded strangers, so no wonder I fled before this host, and took refuge in the quietest corner of the huge mansion.

I knew Treganowen well, having roamed over the place so often in my visits to it with Miss Mildred. Then there was a quiet mystery here which I had liked. The desolate reception-rooms, with their covered carpet, piled furniture, and closed windows; had a charm for me, and it was with subdued step and whispering voice I roamed then through the uninkhabited chambers, gazing in the gloom with a pleased fear at the old portraits, half-believing their eyes followed me with lonely wistfulness as I left them. This is how I had ever seen Treganowen, with a quiet so intense reigning over it, that the murmur of a solitary voice or the sound of a closing door echoed through its empty halls with a painful jar on my strung nerves. Now discomfort, noise, and dust had broken in upon this quiet like an invading army, and the one trim figure that could have soothed me was absent. Nowhere in the confusion could I discover the pink shining face, the snow-white mob-cap and apron, and mottened arms of the kind old house-keeper, Prudence White. I had passed into a dozen rooms and fled from the curious stare of many strange faces without seeing her; so, giving up the search, I crept down

into a leafy conservatory that stood at the back window of the drawing-room, forming one side of a court, paved with a mosaic of marble and serpentine, and surrounded by pillars wreathed with creeping plants. On three sides beneath the pillars and the light roof they upheld ran a sheltered walk lined with flowers, while in the middle of the court a fountain played, adding by its ceaseless music to the ineffable quiet and charm of the place. Tradition said Treganowen was built on the site of an abbey, and on this spot had stood the cloisters; if so, the holy charm, the soothing tranquillity that hovered here might be some lingering shadow of its old sacredness.

I entered this court from the garden, and with silent footfall crept inside the conservatory, and sat myself down among the flowers. Their delicious perfume, their shining leaves, the dashing spray of the fountain, and the quiet shadow of the great bay-tree which hung over it, all soothed me. The holy calm of the place grew into my spirit; my hot restlessness, my fevered longings, subsided into gentle beatings of the heart, and a great calm fell upon me, which was like a dream without its attendant sleep.

I had sat thus a long while, with my head leaning against a pillar among the large leaves of a twining passion-flower, when a slight rustling noise aroused me. I looked around, but could see nothing save the spray of the waterfall, which dashed upwards into the sunless air, or fell upon the glass like the tap of a viewless finger. Thinking this was the sound I had heard, I let my head sink again among the rustling leaves, and called back to my dreaming eyes the broken vision of my reverie; but again the rustle dispelled it, and this time I knew it was a breath and a footstep. Hiding with instinctive shyness from a stranger, I sat perfectly still, only glancing between the leaves into the glowing drawing-room. All within looked like a picture on which a warm light rose and fell fitfully. Wrapped in cachemires which trailed from the sofa to the carpet in rich soft folds, my mother lay sleeping, while the sheen of the huge fire fell in warm light and shadow on her pale, delicate face, and lighted up one bare rounded arm with a dazzling whiteness. On this a flashing gleam, now disappearing, now shining out again, as from a circlet of dull fire, showed me that, before falling asleep, my mother had gathered up the sleeve of her dress, and arrayed her pretty arm in Miss Mildred's gift. Perhaps she had dropped to sleep in contemplating the brilliant gem, for the arm lay across her bosom, and a half-smile parted her lips. I took in every detail of this glowing picture in a moment, even to the full-length portrait of a thin, sinister Treganowen which hung on the wall opposite the sofa, and whose face, in deep shadow above the firelight,

seemed to scowl down darkly on my sleeping mother.

For a moment this was the quiet picture of home and rest which I saw. Another moment, and a man had crept out of the gloom beyond the hovering light of the fire, and, advancing with a noiseless step to the sofa, bent eagerly over the sleeper. In my terrified expectation I heard her quiet, measured breathing, and the hurried, gasping respiration of the man; then he seized her by her white arm, which lay with such dainty softness on the cachemire folds, and shook it, not roughly, but still with a strong grasp.

"Lucy! Lucy!" he said in a sharp, hissing whisper.

My mother opened her eyes, gazed wildly on the man's face, and then, with a ringing, piercing shriek, started to her feet only to fall senseless on the hearthrug.

## CHAPTER XL

A MUTTERED but fearful oath escaped the man's lips.

"All the rascally lot they've got will be on me in a moment!" he ejaculated. Then he stooped hurriedly over my mother, saying softly, "Lucy! Lucy! I am not going to hurt you. What are you frightened at? I am not such a fool as to tell our secret; what should I gain by that? Get you kicked out of this fine nest, I suppose," he added, glancing round the room.

There was no answer to his hurried words, upon which he took my mother by the arm again; but it was only a momentary touch, for the next instant he was on his feet, and, dashing through the conservatory into the court, he fled out by the door that led to the garden. As he rose from his stooping posture over my mother, the firelight fell brightly on his face, and, in spite of his workman's garb, I recognized the man who had seized me with such a hot hand four years ago at Treval. In his hurried escape through the conservatory he almost touched me, and, looking into my childish white face with a scowl, he stopped half an instant to clench his fist with a threatening gesture commanding silence.

All this passed in a duration of time that could easily be measured by twenty or thirty seconds; he had disappeared, therefore, before I could collect myself from the astonishment which had broken in so roughly on my tranquil dreaminess. I started up, however, now, and, rushing to my mother's aid, was by her side before the servants, whom her piercing shriek had alarmed, came to her rescue. Among them was Mrs. Prudence White, the housekeeper, who, as they overwhelmed me with questions, gent-

ly lifted my mother on the sofa, and wheeled it to the window for air.

"What's the matter? What has happened?" was demanded on all sides; but I said nothing in reply.

I have observed that I was naturally a silent, shy child, experiencing a singular difficulty in expressing myself to strangers. It was now as if my speech had been suddenly locked, shutting up all words from my power; and besides this, I think, too, my disposition was inclined to secretiveness, and I preferred a musing, dreamy wonder over events to any elucidation that could be given me.

I turned away, then, silently from the servant's dull fright, and the commonplace explanation they were so glibly giving of my mother's swoon; and meanwhile her consciousness returned, and she too, with her hand on her brow, inquired what had happened. Then, apparently recollection recurred to her suddenly, for she flushed crimson, and cast a terrified glance round the room. Seeing no one but a crowd of servants, she asked peevishly what there was to be alarmed at.

"It's we, ma'am, should ask you," replied the girl with the impertinent nose, whose acquaintance I had made a few hours before. "You screamed most awful."

"I was frightened in my sleep," answered my mother, "and I woke screaming. I was dreaming, I suppose. I was quite alone here, was I not?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, mamma," said I, coming forward. "You were quite alone, and sleeping on the sofa. I was watching you from the conservatory."

Again my mother's face flushed.

"Then it was you, Esther, who frightened me. You little white thing, gleaming out there among the leaves like a spirit, you were enough to frighten any one, especially in this ghostly old nunnery of a place," she added excitedly. At the same time a motion of her hand, an indescribable look in her eyes, plainly told me to be silent if I had seen any thing.

The servants were all retiring, when she rose from the sofa, and gathering her cachemires about her, suddenly exclaimed she had dropped her bracelet.

Every one looked for it, but in vain. On the sofa, on the hearth, among the folds of the shawls, the useless search continued, while my mother grew more and more angry every moment.

"Did you put it away before you fell asleep?" said Prudence White, softly.

"Mrs. White," said my mother, fiercely, "the last thing I looked at before I closed my eyes was my bracelet. And if it is not found, I shall know what to think."

Her cruel insinuation brought the pert girl from her knees—in which attitude she

had been hunting the carpet—with a quick jerk to her feet.

"If you mean to say it's stolen," she cried, "I say as you are no lady to say et. I've lived weth ladies, *real* ladies born, not them as counted theirselves ladies because they married by good luck gentlemen high above their heads as the sun; and they'd scorn to take away honest folks' characters—at sich a time, too, weth a houseful of mountebag Indguns, and blackmoors, and strange workmen."

During this tirade my mother had evidently been too astonished, too furious, even to speak, but her eyes sparkling with fire and her clenched hands proved the passion of anger that moved her.

The girl's last word, the single word "workmen," had acted upon me like a revelation, and as my mother sprang forward in blind anger, crying out hysterically her husband's name, I laid my hand upon her arm.

"Mamma," I said gently, "it is true what she says; there are many strange *workmen* in the house; one of these may have taken your bracelet."

She turned, and our eyes met; then she sank back trembling on the sofa, bursting into hysterical tears.

"Mrs. White," she said, "tell the servants to go. I am sorry—I didn't mean—there, there, I dare say you are right, and I shall find the bracelet somewhere."

The servants retired, not in the best of tempers, and Mrs. White gave me a very scrutinizing look as she left the room.

"Esther," said my mother, in a very low voice, as she hastily dried her tears, "did you see the—the person who frightened me?"

"Yes," said I.

"What did he look like?" she asked, raising herself on her elbow to examine my face in the firelight.

"Like a workman," I answered; "but the last time I saw him he was dressed like a gentleman."

"The last time you saw him?" repeated my mother in an amazed whisper. "Where did you ever see him before?"

"At Treval, four years ago. He is the same man that kissed me, and gave me that brooch."

"What are you saying, child?" said my mother in a tone of intense surprise and pain. And, her lips were so white, she could scarcely form the words.

I repeated my statement.

"And he kissed you?"

"Yes," said I, with a shudder.

"He did not say that he had any right—I mean, he gave you no reason for this strange familiarity?"

"No, mamma."

"And you think he took my bracelet?"



"Yes," said I, "I think so because I saw him stoop and touch your arm."

"Then you are mistaken, Esther, for I have it in my pocket. I remember now putting it there before I fell asleep."

I recollected how I had watched the firelight gleaming in the sparkling rubies as she lay sleeping, so I made no reply.

"Esther, did the man *speak* to me?" said my mother, after a moment of deep silence. She hid her face from me in the folds of the Indian shawl, but I saw her hands trembling as she tried carelessly to arrange her dress.

I repeated the man's words. "And he called you Lucy," I said.

She offered no explanation, she uttered not a word, but she seemed inexplicably relieved by my narration, and her manner, which I had divined rather than felt to be warmer towards me, relapsed to its former coldness.

"You are sure that was all he said?"

"I am quite sure. And he called you Lucy," I reiterated pertinaciously.

My mother bit her lip, and I saw tears start to her eyes, but shading her face with the shawl, she gazed into the fire, and made me no answer.

The evening grew darker and darker around us, and the firelight danced upon her white face, and gleamed in the eyes of the sinister Treganowen scowling on us from the wall, as slowly the pale minutes went by in breathless silence. At last, shading her brow with her hand, my mother turned to me, and broke the painful stillness. She spoke in a careless tone, but my magnetic and sensitive nature too sharply sympathized with the real terror it hid to be deceived for a moment.

"Esther," she said, "this is a matter of no consequence; still I do not wish you to mention it to any one"—she paused—"and particularly to your father. You must give me your solemn promise you will not name it to him. Miss Admonitia said you were a girl who could keep a secret. Now I shall see if that is true, and if it is, I will give you five of these guineas."

My mother opened her purse as she spoke.

"Oh, mamma!" I cried, as my heart bounded against my side as though it had been stabbed, "do not offer me money, I implore you. I will keep your secret, I promise you I will. I can keep a secret well. I will not tell papa."

"You are a strange, prying little thing, Esther, I think," said my mother, suspiciously. "What were you doing in the conservatory?"

"I only went there to be quiet, mamma."

"Well, I expect you to be quiet now, Esther. I don't want to ruin a poor workman, and perhaps deprive him of his bread; that's my only reason for asking you to be silent. I don't believe he was the

person who gave you the brooch, but I shall drive over to Treval to-morrow, and tell Miss Mildred what you say."

"Lucy," said my father, opening the door that led into the hall, "do you know dinner will be ready in half an hour? Are you going to dress? I think it is scarcely worth while on this first day, when all things are still in such confusion."

"Yes, yes, I shall dress," answered my mother in a pettish tone. "Emma has unpacked my things by this time. There, I do wish you'd shut the door and come in or go out, whichever you like best; there's such a draught."

My father shut the door, and we heard his retreating steps across the hall.

"Colonel Treganowen is so disagreeable and tiresome," said my mother.

Then she gathered up her shawls, and prepared to leave the room, but at the door she turned nervously towards me.

"Which way did that workman go, Esther," she asked.

"He went out by the arched door in the court that leads into the garden."

"Well, come up stairs with me; I feel a little afraid."

She took me by the arm, and I accompanied her to her room, where a blazing fire, and shining lights, and two pretty soft dresses, and jewels laid out on the bed for her to choose from, and her maid with a bright sash hung over her arm, awaited her. She threw herself into an arm-chair by the fire, and then sent me alone to the other side of the house to my own room, telling me I had better order some tea for myself, as it was too late for a child like me to have dinner.

My father, however, as I sat crying in the dark, came to me himself, and waited while I bathed my red eyes. Then, taking my hand, he said softly:

"Never mind, Esther. Tell me every thing, and rely upon me always."

## CHAPTER XII.

My mother looked very pretty in her pale lemon-colored dress, which suited her peculiar complexion of clear olive, and set off the lustrous black of her abundant hair. She wore an aigrette of diamonds in her shining tresses, and as these flashed and sparkled, and her white neck and arms gleamed in the light, I gazed at her with intense admiration. Still she was too much dressed for a home dinner with only husband and child, and the round arms, the slender fingers, the white throat, were overloaded with jewels. Unconsciously I felt the picture incongruous and wanting in taste, and I contrasted the glittering, restless image she presented with the pale, tranquil

figure of Miss Mildred. Then I perceived that beautiful as she was, there was a something something wandering in my mother—a grace, a refinement which is to woman like the perfume to the flower, without which one is a gaudy disappointment, soon flung away, and the other a milliner's show, soon despised.

There was little conversation during dinner. My mother made no attempts to be entertaining. She seemed frankly and simply to be occupied in admiring herself. At dessert she played with her bracelets and rings, and played with her white arms in various attitudes on the dark mahogany with a sort of childish pleasure in their beauty which made me wonder at her. There was no trace of terror or of sorrow about her face, but a sort of languid weariness which increased almost to disgust as she grew tired of admiring her loveliness all alone. At last with a sigh and a yawn she arose, enveloped herself in her shawl again, and lay down on the sofa to sleep.

Then my father drew his chair softly to mine, and began conversing in a low tone. He asked me many questions about Treval and its inmates, but I perceived his chief anxiety in all was to get an exact estimation of Mildred's feelings towards me and himself. I strove in vain to fix on his mind an impression of her kindness. I spoke of her unvarying gentleness, her sadness, her good works, her prayers and fastings, but I failed in all to convey to him any idea of an affection for myself. I was vexed at this failure, for I felt I owed her much gratitude, which by some subtle, undefined repugnance I could never pay. It was as though some invisible and shrinking cord within me drew me shuddering back whenever I approached Miss Mildred. I endeavored in vain not to impart this feeling to my father; either he possessed it himself, or some hidden nerve of his thrilled in sympathy with mine, for he suddenly threw his arm around me, and pressed me to him with much emotion.

"It is hard not to be able to protect one's own child," he murmured.

I scarcely think he was aware I heard him, for, putting back my hair, he gazed earnestly at me.

"I read plenty of courage on this brow, Esther," he said. "Happen what may, I see you will not be afraid. If you were a dove, child, fluttering above the fields of a snake, how would you escape?" he asked abruptly.

"I would flee away and be at rest," I answered, in the words of the Hebrew king.

My father was silent. It seemed to me as if he was meditating whether flight were possible.

"Is she indeed a saint? Can she forgive such wrongs? Oh, that I could see into Mildred's heart!" he exclaimed passionately.

The energetic words awoke my mother.

"Mildred's heart!" she said, with much irritation. "Fiddlesticks and rubbish! I'm sick of the subject. In India every thing that was said or done had reference to Mildred, and now that we are near neighbors I suppose it will be ten times worse. If she is such a saint, it is a wonder to me she can't leave other women's husbands alone."

"Lucy!" ejaculated my father, in great agitation.

"Oh, yes, Lucy!" repeated my mother; "it's very fine to say 'Lucy,' like a tragedy king, but it's not so pleasant to feel one's self under the thumb of an old druidess, a bleeding nun, a pious ogress, or whatever she is. I've had my child taken away from me already; it won't astonish me at all if she wants my husband next, or perhaps puts in a claim for Treganowen Towers and estate."

It is astonishing how near to the truth these brutally sensible, small-minded people come at times without knowing it.

My father seemed aghast at this language, and made no reply.

"Are you mad, Lucy?" he asked, in a low, quivering tone.

"Mad? No; I am the only sensible one among you all. I eat, drink, sleep, and worry myself about nobody and nothing. By the by I forgot; here's a letter that old frump Addy gave me for you. Perhaps Mildred gives you a glimpse in it of that ancient fossil, her heart. If so, I'm sure I hope it will content you. I shall not be jealous, I promise you."

She drew the letter from her pocket as she spoke, and threw it on the floor; then pulling the shawl well over her head, she went to sleep again.

Truly my mother was not a woman to trouble herself about other people's sorrows, and as to respecting them, I believe if all the phrenologists in Europe had examined her head with their very best microscopes for a bump of reverence, they would not have found one.

Not without a pang at my heart do I thus speak frankly of my mother, although I am one of those who consider natural ties sacred and holy, only when they prove the fountain-head of natural duties fulfilled, of love, gentleness, and tender care bestowed and returned; still, in spite of the logic of this truth, my pen will trace my mother softly when it can, save where the inexorable facts of the story demand a detail ungarmented.

I picked up Miss Mildred's tiny note and gave it to my father. His hand shook as he took it, and apparently the contents did not reassure him, for it was with an expression of pain that he turned to me and read the few words aloud:

"MY DEAR RALPH—I am grieved that I can not comply with your wish for an interview. Believe me it would distress me too

much. In very truth I am changed fearfully, and some old remains of clinging vanity, some faint lingering of old feelings, will not permit me to let *your* eyes mark the ravages of time and grief on a face you remember only in its youth.

"You will think more meanly of me for this confession, but I speak with this humiliating frankness that you may recognize the true cause of my refusal to see you. I am willing to suffer in your estimation rather than let an erroneous impression rankle in your mind, troubling your repose. You may despise the female vanity and weakness of my feelings, but at least now you will be convinced that unforgiveness and hate are not among them.

"I am sorry Esther should have fallen on the ghastly skeleton in our house prematurely; but since it is so, be assured you have my full permission to relate the terrible history *how* and when you will. I would not play the ungenerous part of telling the father's tale to the daughter, colored by my feelings. No, I have left her mind free and clear of all bias; speak of me, then, as you will. Sometimes in my solitude, shame, and pain, as I look back, I think that not even my worst enemy could condemn me as I condemn myself.

"Admonitia will tell you my wishes respecting Esther's future. Farewell.

"Your friend,

"MILDRED TREMAINE."

"You see," said my father, as his brow contracted. "she counts me as her worst enemy. There is no peace, no forgiveness, between us even now, and there never will be. Mildred Tremaine have any lingering of vanity in her heart about me! Folly! folly! False! false!"

I was silent. A painful weight seemed to fall upon my brain, and a terrible helplessness like the numbed fascination of the bird by the snake, crept about my heart. Each event, each word, only showed me some new link in the chain which bound me hand and foot, and laid me like a victim at Miss Mildred's feet. I had long known myself *hers*. I had known it by some inexplicable feeling which made me powerless in her presence. As a little child, in my most unruly moods, I never dared to disobey her voice. Her tones, low and gentle as they were, crept over me like a cold touch, subduing all my faculties into fear and submission. And now, when this instinctive knowledge of her power came to me in this new way, strengthened by her written words and my father's acquiescence, a dull shudder passed through my frame, and my nerves quivered as though the fire of some great misery were already burning in my veins.

"Esther! Esther!" said my father, in a quick voice, "you are dreaming, my dear!"

I turned towards him, and as my little white childish face met his gaze, I know he read in it the trembling appeal of my heart, for he took my hand—it was so small and thin it was lost in his—and, pressing it between both his palms, he whispered gently—

"Do not fear, Esther! No one shall hurt you, my poor child, while I live—rely on that. I was saying, my dear," he continued, "only you did not hear me, that I cannot tell you Alicia Tremaine's story just yet. You are too young—"

"I am no child, papa," I interrupted. "I do not think I have ever been a child. I have never had any one to play with, so I could only read, and think, and wonder, and perhaps that is why I look so old, and laugh so little. We cannot laugh, you know, if we live alone; if I had a brother or sister—"

But my father did not let me finish. He released my hand abruptly, and paced the room many times before he returned to his seat.

"If what, my dear?" he asked absently.

"If I had had a playmate, papa, I think I might have been happier—nicer—not so old and ugly as mamma says I am now." My lips quivered, and I leant my face upon his knee before I went on. "But I have never spoken to a child, papa, in my life, except little Tom Pengrath, who weeds the flower-beds, and he knows nothing. Once I asked him what he thought about while he was weeding, and he said, 'I doesn't think, miss; I whistles.' Now I am always thinking, thinking, and never till you came, papa, have I had any one to tell all these thoughts to. At church I have seen little children, and, watching them, I have wondered if they had thoughts like mine. But I could not ask them. Miss Admonitia always held my hand in a tight grip as we went down the aisle; and then the great, old-fashioned coach swallowed us up, and every thing felt cold and dark as if I were in prison. That is why I am so grave and old, papa, and not like a child; so you need not fear to tell me the story because of my age."

Why were there tears in my father's eyes as he looked down into my little weird white face and kissed it?

"I have not treated you like a child, Esther," he said, and his tones trembled; "and when I said you were too young, I did not mean childish; I meant rather that our own acquaintance with each other is too young yet. I should like to let you know me better before I unfold a history so painfully connected with myself."

"If it would grieve you to tell it," I answered, "I will wait, if it be for years; only I should like to hear it first from *you*—"

"I understand," interrupted my father, hurriedly; "you shall hear it, Esther, first from my lips."

A servant entered at this moment with

the tea-tray, and the clatter of the cups awoke my mother the second time.

"What, Esther!" she cried, as she rubbed her eyes with some energy. "Is that you up till this time of night? Well, I don't wonder you are as wizen as a white owl, and as old-looking as Methuselah in a black wig! Go to bed, you little object, directly! It is just like you, Ralph, to keep the child up till she has no more complexion than a mummy! I'm sure I should never think there could be such a difference!"—

My father interrupted her in some excitement.

"There, Lucy, my dear, never mind! If you talk so thoughtlessly you will certainly annoy me very much."

"I am to put a padlock on my mouth, I suppose," responded my mother pettishly. "I wonder you and Mildred don't lock me up in something to keep me quiet. A good tall clock-case, now—how would that do? Though even then I dare say I should aggravate her by ticking! There, there, Esther, that will do! Good-night! Oh, get along, you little thing, do! I don't want to be kissed! You've dragged my shawl off my shoulders!"

With a swelling heart I turned towards my father, and received his consoling caress. Then I crept a little tremblingly across the great room, with eyes tear-blinded, and fumbled for the door-handle, which would not turn for a minute in my slight fingers.

"Are you never going?" cried my mother, "you irritating child!"

I got out of the room, feeling the blood rushing like a hot sea to my head.

"I was determined not to like that child!" said my mother in a hard tone, "and I don't!"

I heard the words plainly as I shut the door, and found myself trembling in the arms of Prudence White.

"Hush, my dear!" she said, soothingly; "try not to mind—it's only her little tempers. Cheer up, and you shall come with me to my room."

"Let me go," I whispered, as with a strange strength I undid the clasp of her hands. "I will go with you, but I'll say one word to mamma first."

I opened the door as I spoke.

"Mamma," said I, in a clear, calm tone, that sounded, even to my own ears, like an echo of Mildred's, "there are so many strange workmen about the house that I am afraid. May Mrs. White sleep in my room?"

There was a hurried rustling of my mother's rich amber silk, and she rose from the sofa and came to the door. Her face was pale, her lips apart and trembling; she stooped as if about to whisper to me, but she started back on seeing Prudence White.

"Mrs. White," she said, in her gentlest voice, "I shall be glad if you will sleep in

Esther's room, if she wishes it; not that there is any thing to be afraid of. You know it was Esther herself in the greenhouse who frightened me this evening, and my bracelet all the time was in my pocket. Little nervous thing, my foolish fainting-fit makes her timid. The workmen are all honest, hard-working people, are they not, Mrs. White?"

"I firmly believe so, ma'am."

"Then, Esther, my poor little love, you need not be afraid; but do what you please about sleeping with Mrs. White," said my mother, as she stooped and kissed me graciously.

I let her lips touch my cold cheek, but I did not return her embrace.

She went back to the sofa, trailing her long Indian scarf on the carpet; and Prudence White shut the door, and, taking me by the hand, she went up the great staircase in musing wonder. As for me, I wondered no more. I thought I could read my mother's character like a book now, and from that hour she ceased to be a mystery to me. My thoughts and fancies no longer busied themselves about her, and the sea of love that had surged around her image rushed back upon my own heart in a tide of contempt.

This was my first day at Treganowen—the first I had spent with my father and mother since I quitted them an infant seven years ago.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning my mother drove over to Treval, but she did not offer to take me with her, and I gazed sorrowfully after the departing carriage as I stood in the long wintry avenue, with the dead leaves dropping at my feet. I knew she was gone to consult Miss Mildred, whom she hated and pretended to despise, but to whom, nevertheless, she now flew eagerly for advice and help. In my wistful reverie I followed her on her journey, step by step, into that pale presence. I longed to possess the fairy power of making myself invisible, that I might creep unseen upon their interview, and hear all they said, and thus lay bare at once all this torturing mystery gnawing at my brain. It was this, I fancied, which kept up the dull incessant pain in my head which had never quitted me since the night I got out on the roof. On every side I was tormented by secrets, and admonitions to silence most oppressive to my heart, and dangerous to my imagination. I longed to escape from this gloomy labyrinth in which my young feet wandered darkly, but there was no help, no clue, anywhere. I was so lonely. I might stretch out my hands in vain, and beat the darkness in my despair—

no loving voice would cheer me, no loving hand would succor me. The warning that bade me be silent was useless, superfluous. Whom was I to tell?—to whom could I pour out these heavy thoughts and fears? My father, my sole friend, was the one for whom my lips were the most strictly sealed, on pain of grieving, of injuring him; and except him whom did I care to tell? Except him I was utterly alone in the world.

Oh how lonely it was here at Treganowen! A few days ago a thousand bright hopes hovered round the thought of my mother like a coming glory that was to warm my life. Now they had faded out, and were lying cold about me like a pall. It was ever, then, to be the same darkness. Down the vista of years through which I looked, I could nowhere see a green spot sunny with childish love or childish playmates—always the same solitude, the same creeping awe and mystery gathering me about. Thus thinking, I sat down on an old ash-root in the gray, cold, avenue, and, leaning my head against the tree, while the wind whistled among its branches, I brought before my dreaming eyes a vision of myself. I saw a little weird child, with sad look of longing, and tiny clasped hands, wandering companionless from winter to summer, from summer to winter again. I heard the hushed footfall—so unlike the pattering step of childhood—sounding softly, timidly, through the deserted rooms at Treval. I watched the gliding shadows coming and going on the lawn, on the western front, on the carved ceilings, and among them that one face of terror looming out white and ghastly on the blank wall. Then there rose before it the pale figure of Miss Mildred, shining from within a dim halo, while a glimmering death-white hand pointed ruthlessly to the murdered Alicia, who, shrouded in gloom, crouched at her feet, in shape like that creeping horror that had haunted me on the roof.

With closed eyes, I watched myself through that scene with an eager interest in it as if all were new to me, and I—not the actor, but a spectator—were actually witnessing some visible drama played before me. I saw the rustling paper borne on the wind travelling down the darkness to meet me. I saw again the horrible fascination with which I read it, the hand of fate that threw it at my father's feet, and the glad spring with which I rushed into his arms.

It was strange that all this seemed so far off now—stranger still that the occurrence of yesterday, which would have terrified so many children, did not rise among my visions, but seemed to me unworthy of a place amid my dreams at Treval. I only wondered vaguely what my mother's secret could be, dwelling on it at times with a shrinking repugnance, mingled with a con-

tradictory instinctive satisfaction, like that a man feels in grasping a weapon, or in having a full purse. I knew, somehow, my knowledge of the man's theft would buy kindness and forbearance for me; and I was glad for this, but otherwise the matter did not trouble my imagination like the mystery at Treval.

Suddenly a sound disturbed my reverie, and, looking up, I saw my father pass by on horseback. Gloomy and full of thought, he did not observe the little shrinking figure seated on the ash-root, but went on regardless. Shivering now in my unnoticed loneliness, I drew my cloak around me, and watched him from between the trees. Soon he vanished, and seemed to me only like a dream in the midst of a dream.

Then my fancies changed, and, amid the uncertain sunshine piercing brokenly through the branches, I called up memories of my eccentric tutor, with his gaunt limbs, his long, lank face, and silent ways; and I laughed as I remembered my childish awe of him, and the trembling fear in which I coned my lessons, followed later by a dim consciousness that he, too, had an inner life of dreaminess and gloom, through which he saw me as through a mist, and sometimes painfully hated me. I let my thoughts gather about him steadfastly, with newly-awakened curiosity pondering on his life—who he was, whence he came, and why he—evidently an Englishman and a stranger—should choose to live in a little seagirt village of Cornwall. In Trevalla Churchtown, save for the poor curate and his sister, a civilized man was companionless. Yet here this accomplished scholar, this erudite philosopher, had fixed his dreary abode for many years—how many I knew not. There was no intercourse between him and Treval, save on the days when he came to give me lessons, when Miss Admonitia saw him, and treated him with the profoundest respect; but he never beheld Miss Mildred's face, and he never ate or drank in the house. The decanter of wine and the cake and biscuits placed on the table invariably remained untouched.

I grew weary of him at this point, and dismissed his image from my mind with a wave of my hand. And, meanwhile, the day brightened warmer around me, broken gleams of sunshine came down from the gray clouds, crowning the hanging wood of Treganowen with glory, starring my hair with gems, and sprinkling gold over the brown dead leaves lying at my feet. I stooped and gathered a handful into my lap.

"There are no fairies now," I said, wistfully, "else, knowing how forlorn and weary I am, they would send one of their bright sisterhood to help me—a radiant figure bright with smiles, all dressed in green and silver, who would touch me with her wand,

and I should rise up a fair princess, whom all the world would love. Mamma would not hate me then"—tears started to my eyes at this thought, and fell upon the leaves lying in my lap, with which my fingers played restlessly—"and I should not cry any more," I said. "The fairy would give me all I wished for, and—let me see—for what should I ask first?"

And now as regards what followed I can never to this day tell distinctly whether I fell asleep in the midst of my childish thoughts, and saw it in a dream, or whether the long fever—of which I shall soon have to speak—then creeping on me, may not have already touched my brain. At all events, it seemed to me that, whispering clearly, coldly in the wind, the voice of Miss Mildred fell upon my ear—

"She shall never hear the name of him for whom we destine her. She shall never see him till I choose."

And I instantly demanded of the fairy that I might hear his name, and see him to tell him that I hated him; and I asked that, in all Miss Mildred so tyrannically resolved concerning me, her hopes might wither like these dead leaves.

Then mournfully from without their rustlings came the answer of the fairy—

"Oh, unhappy one, child of sorrow, shrinking from atonement, take thy wish, though it be evil. Weave a garland for thy bridal of these yellow leaves, and watch over the dead like Mildred. In the garland is his name."

A sudden chill passed over me, and I awoke with a start from the fevered imaginings or dream in which I was plunged; yet, moved by some superstitious feeling, I obeyed the voice, and gathering up the leaves in my lap, I fashioned them roughly into a wreath, with which I crowned my garden hat. Then I grew very tired and cold, the dull aching in my head became more intense, and, leaning my forehead against the tree, I closed my eyes as if to shut out the pain, and then gradually I forgot all things.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

THE sounds of wheels and whispering voices aroused me, yet I did not uncloze my eyes, but in the luxury of partial rest, partial relief from pain, I listened.

"Stephen, you shall not go a step further. Mildred would never forgive me."

"Is that Miss Treganowen sleeping there in the cold?" asked a young, clear, manly voice. "Truly, if you don't take better care of her, our marriage will partake too much of the Capulet and Montague order, and I shall have to seek her, like Romeo, in

the vaults. I think I shall go and take a peep at her. Is she handsome?"

"No, indeed," answered the voice of my mother.

But the speaker had not stayed for an answer. He urged his horse a few paces in advance of the carriage, and, with one hand on the old ash-trunk, he bent low from the saddle and looked into my face. I opened my eyes slowly, and met his for an instant, and then closed them again.

"Do not wake her," said Admonitia in a low, eager tone. "She is in one of her dead slumbers, and if you are cautious you may look at her without fear. I have seen her sleep for hours like that at Treval," she continued, as if speaking to my mother—"a strange, odd sleep, in which—" But here the murmur of voice and step showed me they had descended from the carriage, which rapidly drove away, and were walking up the avenue towards the house.

The young gentleman took instant advantage of their departure.

"You are not asleep?" he said, softly.

"No," I answered. And now I felt a burning glow suffuse my face.

"Then suppose you open your eyes again," he whispered, laughingly.

I did so, but without looking up.

"Oh," said the young man, laughing again, "if you don't look at me, you can't tell how you like me, and I'm dying to know."

"I can tell you that without looking at you," I answered in a low voice.

"Indeed!" replied the gentleman sarcastically. "Then pray oblige me with an avowal of your sentiments. Don't you perceive the dreadful state of anxiety I am in? Do say you love me!" and he folded his hands in mock entreaty.

"I hate you!" said I, in a tone as intense and concentrated as my childish voice would permit.

"Ha, ha! do you really?" cried the gentleman, with a burst of merry laughter. "This is rather good, 'pon my honor. Don't you know, young lady, that one day I'm to be your lord and master? Ah, I've done it now," he added, as if to himself, with a shrug of his shoulders, and a glance at the retreating figure of Miss Admonitia.

"It does not matter," said I, in the grave manner of a staid age. "I knew it before, and your assertion makes no difference whatever to my feelings. I should hate you all the same. You will never be 'lord and master' of mine, as you insolently express yourself. You think me a child, I suppose; but you are mistaken; I expect I know a great deal more than you. You don't look very clever."

"Doubtless your learning equals your politeness, young lady," remarked the gentleman, as he bit his lip slightly. "And suppose now I return the compliment by saying that I don't like you?"

"Sir, you are welcome," said I, with a supreme curl of the lip.

"Whew," whistled the gentleman, "there's a nice little spirit here to tame, I declare. Oh, you'll talk differently, you know, when I have you quite under my thumb."

I raged at this, and could scarcely contain my passion; but when, raising my eyes to his—a full flash of fire in them—I caught his laughing face, so fresh, and handsome, and gay, mocking my anger, my lips trembled, the emphatic "Never!" died on my tongue, and drooping my head on my hands, I burst into tears.

"Is it possible so learned, so composed a young lady can cry?" said the mocker, wickedly.

I cried on without heeding him, a great bitterness swelling up like a sea into my thoughts.

"Come, come," he said, "I didn't mean to tease you till you cried. Don't be alarmed. I am not an ogre to carry you off and eat you, or a Bluebeard to run away with and marry you. I have not the slightest intention of doing it. My old fairy godmother, Admonitia, may hammer her admonitions into my head till doomsday yet she won't succeed. No, there is a sweet, pretty little girl at Clifton growing up for me, whom I mean to have when she is old enough; so tranquillize yourself, little one, and gratify your pretty little malice with all the hate you choose; it won't hurt my adamant heart, my love."

He adjusted the voluminous folds of his neckcloth, and looked down on me magnanimously. Mortified, and my heart swelling with pride and grief, I still rested my aching head, my burning face, upon my hands, and cried on silently.

I believe he grew uneasy and restless under my continued tears, for after a moment's pause he said, in a voice that had lost its mocking tone—

"Come, what shall I give you to dry your tears?"

"Nothing," I sobbed, "only go away."

"Well, I'll bring you something from Bristol, the next time I come. What shall it be—a doll?"

"I am too old for dolls," said I, and a little sunshine began to appear through my tears, so amused did I feel at the question.

"Too old! Why, you are a tiny little creature! You are not more than ten, are you?"

"I am thirteen," said I with some dignity.

"Thirteen! why Alice—that's the pretty little girl I told you of, who is growing up for me—is thirteen, and she is as tall—as tall as this."

He put his riding-whip against the tree to mark the height he meant. Instantly noted the place, and mentally resolved to measure

my own height against it the moment he was gone.

"Well," he continued, "since you and Alice are the same age, I will ask her advice as to what I shall bring you."

I immediately grew contemptuous at the thought.

"As if a town girl," said I, "who does not know an oak from a rush, could possibly tell what I should like!"

He laughed again. "Oh, my little sweetheart is very clever," he said; "she can speak French, and play the piano, and sing beautifully. Can you do that?"

"No," I answered with a quick blush; "but I know tin from copper, and granite from schist, and I daresay she doesn't. And I shouldn't pick toadstools for mushroom-rooms, or walk down a shaft with my eyes open, and that's what a man from Bristol did here not long ago."

"Upon my word," said the young gentleman, with a merry laugh, "you are rather too Cornish for me."

Nevertheless, I saw by the gleam in his eye that he was not ill-pleased with my speech.

"So you do know tin, eh?" he continued, copying the Cornish accent in a way no Englishman can. "Well, in reward for that, as I like to see the old Cornish fire blaze up sometimes, you shall choose yourself what I shall bring you. Quickly say, for here is my most respected godmother directing her grim countenance to this quarter."

"Bring me Spenser's 'Faerie Queene,'" I faltered hurriedly.

"Ah!" said the astonished gentleman, gravely; "of course, exactly the book such an elf as you would choose. You are lately from Elfin-land yourself, I believe. I see you have told me your age backwards. You mean you are thirty-one—what am I saying?—thirteen hundred and thirty-one, I should say. Permit me to apologize," he added, taking off his hat with a mock bow, "for having treated one of the little people with such disrespect. I ought to have recognized from the first that I was speaking to a tiny brown pixy of unknown antiquity."

At this moment Miss Admonitia had advanced so near us as to be almost within hearing, and the laughing gentleman, putting up the tablets hastily on which he had noted my request, held out his hand to me.

"Well, my little enemy, will you shake hands on condition that I promise and vow never to put you under my marital thumb? I give you my honor I won't have you."

"It is I who won't have you," I replied, rather ruffled. "I refused you the first."

"I deny that," he laughed, looking at me curiously. "However, I promise you that you shall refuse me—when I ask you."

He took off his hat with a low bow, all his chestnut curls glistening in the light, and turned his horse to greet Miss Admonitia and my mother, who had joined her.

"What have you been saying to Esther?" asked the former in a sharp tone. "I told you not to awake her."

"My most respected godmamma," replied the saucy youth, "I have said nothing to her beyond naming you as a sort of fairy who presided over my birth, and provided me with a grim old tower and a wife. I presented myself, therefore, as a man having authority over her—as a husband, in fact—and she treated me accordingly—that is, with the utmost impertinence. We shall make a charming couple; we hate each other already."

My mother laughed musically, but Admonitia's face flushed, as it always did when she was vexed.

"What if Mildred heard you?" she said.

I glanced at the young man with a sort of triumph as I marked, by the sudden change in his face, that he too felt and acknowledged the wondrous power of that strange, shadowy woman.

"But Mildred does not hear me," he pleaded, "and I respect her feelings too much ever to permit her to hear me. I should not have teased Esther if she had not told me the child had inadvertently read some letter which gave her an inkling of my cruel design to gobble her up, body and soul, as soon as she is old enough"—here he shook his "marital thumb" at me as though to bid me keep silence as to our mutual renunciation of the agreeable bargain—"and so I thought a little fun would not matter."

"You are a silly boy," said Admonitia, "and I daresay you have done harm with your nonsense. It was nothing but curiosity which made you insist upon coming with us, or rather watching for us on the road, and then following us hither."

"And very natural," said my mother, taking his part.

I perceived by the gleam in her eyes that she was glad he should see me thus at disadvantage, in an ugly, unbecoming brown frock, thick garden shoes, my hair disarranged, and my face disfigured by crying. I resented her feeling, not his words.

"Is it natural, then, to him to be impertinent, and curious, and disagreeable?" I asked passionately, as, twitching my hat from my head, I began to tear from it the garland of dead leaves I had twisted around the crown.

"Did you ever see such a child?" asked my mother, with sparkling eyes. "Some people think they can bring up children better than their own mothers can, and this is the result."

Save for a glance of fire from Miss Admonitia's eyes, no heed was taken of this innuendo.

"Oh, her disposition towards myself is charming," said the provoking young man, making his horse caracole before me with many antics to prevent my retreat. "It's

a delightful little arrangement you have all made between you for our mutual happiness. It will be sure to succeed—such plans always do, you know. Just ask her how much she likes me."

I looked round at them all, and into my child's heart, inexperienced as it was, there crept a sense of their cruelty, not only in disposing of me as a victim bound hand and foot, but in making sport of a poor, helpless, unloved little creature, defenceless in their grasp as a bird in the hands of the fowler.

"I hate you all," said I, with flashing eyes; "and if I am strange, and weird, and old, as this boy says I am (I did not choose to call him a man), whose fault is it? You have brought me up as you chose, and it was your choice that I should learn nothing to make me glad or young. Take care!" I screamed, as the pain of which I had been conscious all day ran sharply through my forehead—"take care, lest, having tried to make me a witch, you succeed too well, and I turn round, and blight and mildew you all." Then I added in a calmer voice, "If you think to dispose of me just as you please when I am grown up, you are mistaken."

In the sudden lull of astonishment and silence I walked away without looking at them again, no voice bidding me stay; but when I had got half-way down the avenue, the sharp trot of a horse made me start aside, though even then without looking around.

"Miss Treganowen," said the voice of Admonitia's godson, "I am come to bid you farewell, and to ask your pardon. I thought I was teasing a child—a child unusually young and childish for her years. I see I was mistaken, for something has made you unnaturally aged, Miss Treganowen, and I am sorry I have hurt your feelings. Can you forget it?" He put out his hand frankly, and I took it, the tears starting to my eyes. "You look ill," he said kindly, still holding my hand. "If there is any one within those grim old towers who loves you, go to her and be taken care of." Then bending low from his horse, he added in a still softer voice, "I admire your spirit, Miss Treganowen. I am exactly of your opinion. I don't intend to be disposed of either. Don't change, there's a good girl, and we shall yet get out of the labyrinth; there is no chance of happiness for us else; the whole scheme is absurd. I'll not forget the 'Faerie Queene.' What a mistake I made in thinking you ten, little Titania!"

He relinquished my hand suddenly, took off his hat, and galloped away. And now I could not resist turning my head, and, without knowing why, I was glad to see that he passed Miss Admonitia and my mother with only a bow, not slackening for a moment the speed of his horse. I watched him till the great trees of the avenue hid him from sight.



## CHAPTER XV.

On entering the house his image still pursued me, and I wandered restlessly from room to room—avoiding the one in which my mother and Admonitia sat—searching for some relief for my troubled thoughts. I had seen so little of my father that I began to think I had not even him for a friend, and a morbid wretchedness stole over me as I felt how lonely and forlorn I was. Leaning out of a window in this egotistical, miserable frame of mind, I perceived Miss Admonitia in the court with all the workmen around her. Instantly guessing her motive, and becoming interested, I listened with all my might.

"Are you all here?" she said.

"Yes," answered one of the men.

"How is that?" asked the lady. "There were seven of you yesterday, and I see only six to-day."

The men looked at each other, and then the master carpenter stepped forward.

"Well, mum," he said, "I'll tell 'ee how it were. A man comed to me, a ded, and a says, 'Comraade,' a says, 'you be going to work at Treganowen, I reckon?' 'Iss, sartainly I be,' I answers. 'Well,' a says, 'I haven't had arra spell of work for well-nigh 'pon three months, and ef so be as you'd taake me 'long of your peere, you'd be doing a poor man a bit of good, and you waient hurt yourself noways, I bla.' So I 'greed, and a comed, a ded, but where a comed from, or where a es a-gone to, I caent tell, n't I, more'n tha dead."

"Oh! so he is gone?" said Miss Admonitia.

"Iss, he's gone, a es, and wi'out so much as a word of good-by to norra person here."

The other workmen now broke into the discourse, each one giving a different account of the missing man, but all agreeing that he was a stranger, and so clumsy at his tools that it was evident he had never served his time to any honest trade.

"Should you know the man again?" asked Miss Admonitia.

A mason replied he should, and two others said they thought they should, but the rest confessed that, having worked with him only one day, and then in another part of the house, they did not believe they could swear to him.

"Miss Admonitia," said I, from the window, "I could swear to that man anywhere."

"You, child!" cried the astonished lady, looking up. "Where did you ever see him?"

"I saw him—" said I, hesitating; "hasn't mamma ever told you?"

"No."

Miss Admonitia spoke in an irritated tone, and, tapping her foot on the pave-

ment, she murmured something about constant insincerity.

"I saw him—when he frightened mamma in the drawing-room; and it was he who gave me that—who kissed me, I mean, once at Treval."

Miss Admonitia's face, upturned to mine, changed beneath my words from its vexed red to deadly paleness. She was unable for a moment to master her emotion; then in a low, quick tone she asked if I had named this to my mother; and, on my answering in the affirmative, she exclaimed passionately that she had been cheated and betrayed into a course of conduct detrimental to the interests of her family. Then, apparently annoyed at her own unguarded expressions, she dismissed the men in a few kind words, saying she thought the stranger was a poor tramp, or perhaps a gipsy; and, since he was gone *without* stealing any thing, she, pitying his forlorn poverty, should not trouble herself to pursue him.

Upon this Miss Admonitia entered the house, and I was not surprised to find myself in a moment summoned to the drawing-room. My mother was in tears, and furious. She started forward on seeing me, and shook me roughly by the arm while she showered on me a storm of epithets which astonished me by their coarseness. I bore the shock without flinching, although she followed up the shake by a blow on the face which made me stagger. Crimson with confusion, pain, and anger, and my very heart breaking within me at the thought that this was the mother for whom I had prayed and wept through all my motherless childhood, I yet had strength to turn and ask Miss Admonitia in a calm voice why she had sent for me.

To my astonishment her eyes met mine full of tears, and, rising from her chair hastily, she undid the hot clasp of my mother's hand from my bruised arm, and placed her by main force on the sofa.

"Lucy Polwhele," she said, in a tone of withering contempt, "it was in vain, seemingly, that Mildred and I married you to a gentleman. You are the same ill-tempered, low woman that you ever were. The pert seamstress of the Plymouth garret dressed in finery on Sundays—wasn't it sometimes stolen finery?—was ever peeping through the rich apparel of Miss Polwhele, the belle of Penrhyn, and now not all the diamonds and cachemires of Mrs. Treganowen can hide her. For shame!" she cried, while her eyes flashed indignation. "Learn to control your unhappy nature better, or at least do not show it in ill-usage to your child. Beware! for if I relate this scene to Mildred, the whole of your present state will sink from you like some castle you may have built in the air."

My mother, who had been beating her hands together in hysterical weeping, ap-

peared to think it best to calm herself. She commenced some broken protestations of gratitude, mingled with entreaties that Mildred might not be set against her; but Miss Admonitia interrupted her sternly, and, turning to me, she took my hand and placed me in a chair by her side.

"Mrs. Treganowen affirms," said Admonitia, "that you never told her this workman was the same man who had that brooch in his possession."

I was silent, and after a moment's pause, she continued—

"I need not say, Esther, that I know you have told me the truth. Perhaps Mrs. Treganowen forgot the circumstance, unless she has reasons of her own for concealing it."

"My reason," sobbed my mother. "was that I thought Esther must be mistaken, for the man who gave her the brooch could not have been Paul, and it was Paul whom I saw yesterday."

"And why might it not be Paul who had the brooch? Are all his possessions acquired with irreproachable honesty?" asked Miss Admonitia, quietly.

"Because—because," cried my mother, with a sudden flush, "Paul is not a murderer, and the man who had that brooch was certainly one of the gang that murdered your sister Alicia."

"Miserable woman, full of vile secrets and wretched memories," cried Admonitia, with a sudden access of emotion before which my mother's smaller passion paled away, "you have a reason for that assertion which you will not tell me. But hear me. I will bring the murderers of my sister to justice, and pursue Paul himself to the gallows, if I find he is in the remotest degree connected with these miscreants."

With a cry that rang through my ears, my mother sprang up only to throw herself at Admonitia's feet.

"You will not be so cruel!" she cried. "You cannot do it!"

"Why not?" asked Miss Admonitia, holding herself stern and erect in spite of the clinging clasp of my mother's passionate fingers.

"Because I love him still—because he is the only creature that ever loved me. Through all my miserable childhood and youth, if he was wicked to others he was a guardian angel to me. What do you know of wretchedness?" she cried, with a sudden burst of fury, pale and terrible in its strength. "It is I who could tell you of suffering. You shall not touch Paul."

"Why not?" repeated Miss Admonitia, in the same impassive way.

"You will kill Ralph."

"Colonel Treganowen has supported deep sorrows, and he still flourishes," said Admonitia, in a still colder tone, as she moved towards the door.

"You shall not go!" shrieked my mother, holding her dress with both hands. "I will tell Mildred; she will prevent you."

Miss Admonitia turned on her fiercely, the crimson flush hot on her brow.

"Do you dare to insinuate," she said, proudly, "that Mildred will not second every effort of mine to find Alicia's murderer?"

"No," said my mother, with a despairing courage like a creature standing at bay, "I say that the last person on earth whom Mildred wishes to find is the man who killed her sister."

"You are lying!" said Miss Admonitia, with shaking lips; "but if it be true, I will do it alone."

And still she tried to move towards the door.

"No! no!" cried my mother, clinging to her now with both arms. "Forgive me for what I said! Have mercy on me!"

For answer, Miss Admonitia undid the passionate clasp that held her, and walked steadily across the room. My mother started to her feet; her eyes flashed hatred and defiance.

"You have had no mercy on me!" she cried; "I will show none to you. It was Paul himself who killed Alicia. I, wretched child that I was, saw him. Now tell Mildred from me, and see if she will touch a hair of his head."

I heard no more. The room swam around me, a strange darkness fell over me, a deadly sickness and sensation of being carried away to a great distance, and then all was a blank.

## CHAPTER XVI.

It was November when I fell ill, and this blank continued for me all the winter through, till I woke one morning to feel the breath of spring wafted through the window, while the song of birds came with it, and the scent of a thousand flowers loaded it with balm. A sense of intense peace pervaded my being. I lay still and listened in a fulness of joy no words can tell to the song of a linnæa perched amid the blossoms of a thorn, whose branches touched the window-sill. All was so quiet that not a pin-drop disturbed the little songster, whose hallelujah rose to the blue heavens in clear thrilling notes, soft and musical as a streamlet's flow. I followed him, note by note, till he was still. Then he flew away, but another and another took his place, while, with enchanted ears and eyes, tearful with joy, I listened and watched.

Here was the bright goldfinch, arrayed like feathered king, there the garden warbler in russet and black, the speckled thrush and swart blackbird, with song sweet and

clear as a running brook, and the tiny tomtit chirping his little loves in melodious jerks and catches that seemed to defy the very universe to follow him for joy and courage. As I lay in pleasant weakness listening, I wondered if all were real, or whether I had awoke in some far-off world which was not heaven, but so near it that heaven's angels, as they journeyed to and fro from star to star, on their missions of love, chose it for a resting-place, and shook beauty over it with lavish wing as their closing pinions softly descended.

Meanwhile the sunshine crept in further, and checkered my white bed with a glittering spectrum of my window, flecked with a hundred shadows of dancing leaves, that tapped friendly on its panes and nodded kindly to me in my weakness, adding their greeting to the linnet's song, while the bark of a dog joined heartily in their loving good-morrow, falling on my ear with a pleasant strangeness, like a new sound never heard before.

Soon other sounds came creeping in through the morning mist, and with them came faintly dim memories, not hurting me, but gently fanning my soul with refreshing thought, till gradually there broke upon my sense the knowledge that I had been long ill, but that danger and death were put away from me now. Claspings my thin hands together I prayed and thanked God; but very weakly, very imperfectly did my few murmured words convey to heaven the deep joy, the calm, the delight of existence, and the ecstasy of praise that filled my being. I lay still another moment that the tears which had gathered in my eyes might go back to their wells, and then painfully I succeeded in raising my head from the pillow and looking around me.

Through the window I saw the green, smooth lawn, the waving trees, the budding thorn bursting into blossom, the glossy laurels glittering with a sheen that closed my languid eyes, the soft hue of the spring foliage on the chestnut, sycamore, and beech, and over all a canopy of ethereal blue, pearly with clouds, and set with that resplendent jewel, the morning sun. The balmy atmosphere was laden with spring odors, and filled with sunshine that seemed its very self and yet not itself, but rather its bright spirit, that steeped it in rejoicing, and vivified it into a full glory of life and light. With a swelling heart, beating warm with the joy of my new birth to health and loveliness, I breathed this beauty into my very being, and made it a part of myself. For what we have once seen and once loved with a true worship is forever after a portion of our souls—our very own—a part of that mysterious inheritance which, while we live, we are ever enriching or impoverishing, that heritage which we call *soul*, which we water with tears, and sow with laughter, com-

fort with hope, and strengthen with faith against the blights of grief and sin, till the great Steward of our souls puts forth His sickle—we call it death—and requires of us the account of our harvest.

That blue, sunny sea answering the sparkling breeze by a shower of diamonds flung upwards as in play, seemed not too mighty, not too deep to be a type of the unfathomable thought, the boundless bliss of my young spirit, as she, too, rejoiced in her creation, and, floating down the waves of time, sparkled in the sunshine and joy of life. Gazing out on the picture framed by my window, I could not tire of its beauty, ever changing as it was, with something new creeping into it. Now a white sail crossing the disk and departing, now a flying bird like a passing spirit, a butterfly like a winged flower, a gambolling spaniel, or the shadow of a fleeting cloud—all these changed the picture's aspect every minute, and fixed my smiling wonder. Turning away my head at last, I encountered the calm gray eyes of Prudence White fixed on me curiously. She was seated at a little round table on the side of my bed opposed to the window, and she had a bit of needle-work in her hand. Her quiet, neat figure, so prim and nice, made another picture for me which my eyes gathered in with pleasure, and I looked at her and smiled.

"Miss Esther," she said, and a sudden change came over her face, "are you better?"

"Yes, much better," I answered. But my voice sounded so weak and low to my own ears that I was startled with a vague surprise.

"Thank God!" said the kind old house-keeper. And, dropping her work, she clasped her hands, while tears started to her eyes as she looked up in thankfulness.

"Don't cry, Prudence," said I, faintly.

"No, miss, I won't, but I'm so glad!" Saying which, the good soul raised her apron to her eyes under the pretence of wiping them, while in reality beneath the cover she shed a copious shower of hearty tears. Then bustling away for a moment she came back with a cup of broth, which seemed to me the veriest nectar ever tasted by mortal.

"We must lie down again now," said Prudence. "But first, look here, Miss Esther: here's something to make you laugh."

She pulled back my curtain as she spoke, and displayed the slumbering figure of the pert-nosed servant-girl lying all of a heap on the floor, rolled up in one of those many-caped great-coats then worn by gentlemen.

"There, that's what master gave her to keep her warm, and the way she curls herself up in it would be a lesson to a hedgehog," said Prudence. "Bless you, Miss Esther, she'll sit up for any number of nights, and never feel sleepy till sunrise, and then she blinks like an owl, and drops."

Here the girl suddenly opened her eyes, and perching herself on one red elbow, she regarded me with great astonishment. I smiled at her comical face, which seemed to increase her wonder to an enormous extent.

"Well, gawk," said Prudence, with sundry winks and nods, "what arree staring at now?"

"Are you glad to see me better?" I asked. "Look: I have eaten a full basin of broth."

"Lor!" said the girl. And whole sentences strung together could not so strongly express surprise as did this simple exclamation. As I looked at her wide-opened eyes, and her countenance stupefied as at the sight of a miracle, I could not help laughing.

"Why, what is the matter?" I asked. "You look as if you were out of your mind with wonder."

This speech of mine completely upset the girl's gravity.

"Well, I never!" she cried. "I look out o' my mind, do I! O lor. Mrs. White, that I should live to hear missee say that as grave as a judge! I be the waun that looks out o' my mind, be I! O lor!"

Here she rolled to and fro in a fit of interminable laughter, in which Prudence could scarcely refrain from joining. Stopping at last, she looked at me with an expression of patronizing benevolence and satisfaction.

"Well, et's a mericul," she said, "and a blessed waun. To think of her waking up all of a suddint as sensible as Solomon, and as peart as a magpie! Aw, Miss Esther, we've all bin wisht about 'ee, sure enough, and a fine passel' of asnegers' we've had trapesing<sup>1</sup> and tarvyng<sup>2</sup> down to Tregan-owen to pomster<sup>3</sup> 'ee up; ees, fye, and narra waun of 'em able to do et. Sure, I feel scratchy<sup>4</sup> when I think of aal thees tootledum-patticks<sup>5</sup> chunking<sup>6</sup> maaster's cunyn<sup>7</sup> like 'taties. Aw, we've bin in a cruel taasking<sup>8</sup> 'bout 'ee, Miss Esther, thic's a fac'."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mary," said I, "for caring for me."

"Hark to her now, the poor cheel-vean; she don't know what I be caaled, and she's bin screeching 'Jenifer! Jenifer!' day and night till I was skeered of my aun name, I wea."

"Is your name Jenifer?" said I. "That's a very old Cornish name, and one that a queen bore once in King Arthur's time."

"Please, Miss Esther, to lie down and be quiet," said Prudence, uneasily. "Don't 'ee begin 'pon the old kings and queens jist yet; let their bones, lie, do 'ee now, co."

I laughed a little, lay down as she bade me, and fell asleep. What a beautiful sleep that was, and how fresh and gay I felt when I woke up at midday! And there was my father sitting down by my bedside watching me, and a doctor was there—a pleasant doctor with wonderful eyes, caressing coaxing, and Cornish to the backbone. And steaming on the round table stood a little teapot, a crisp loaf, and a tiny pot of creamy butter. My father looked pale and thin, but he answered my smile with a look of joy beaming over his face like sunshine, and then he stooped and kissed me; whereupon the doctor with the merry eyes, declaring that was a very good example to follow, stooped and kissed me also; only he gave me two kisses instead of one, because he said he came second, a reasoning which made me laugh.

"Laugh on, Miss Esther," said the doctor, as he coolly installed himself at the round table and began pouring out the tea. "You require three things to make you well—laughter, food, and sleep—and I'm coming every day to see you have all three."

He brought me some tea as he spoke, and a plate of thinnest bread and butter of his own cutting, and watched me eat and drink with a pleasure that rendered his merry face singularly handsome. I was very weak, but very glad and happy, and eager to talk.

"This tea is so nice, and the bread and butter is nice, and, do you know, I think you are very nice, too," said I to the doctor, as I patted the hand so gently smoothing my pillow. A curious shadow—I should have said of tears had he been a woman—came into his merry gray eyes, and the kind hand I touched stole around the cushion, supporting me with a comforting strength that made me fancy myself quite well.

"Poor little birdie," he said softly, "how ill it has been!"

"And have you taken care of me all the time?" I asked; "you and papa?"

"Not all the time," answered the doctor, a little gravely.

"I wish you had been in Dr. Spencer's hands earlier, Esther, my poor child," said my father; "you would have been spared much suffering."

"I have not suffered any thing," said I, smiling at the doctor, who was smoothing back my hair, and looking at me anxiously.

Somehow I did not feel in the least shy of him, and I suffered my childish head to lean upon his breast with all the confidence with which a bird nestles beneath its mother's wing. In my calm weakness I felt no curiosity about this new friend, but was content to enjoy his soothing presence without asking questions. When my tea was over, those kind hands laid me back gently on my pillow, and, looking alternately at his smiling face and my father's grave, earnest eyes, I fell asleep, and my dreams were pleasant.

<sup>1</sup> Parcel.      <sup>2</sup> Blockheads.      <sup>3</sup> Wandering.

<sup>4</sup> Storming.      <sup>5</sup> Cure.

<sup>6</sup> Mad with anger.      <sup>7</sup> Complete simpletons.

<sup>8</sup> Swallowing.      <sup>9</sup> Coin.

<sup>10</sup> Little child.      <sup>11</sup> A corruption of Guinevere.

<sup>12</sup> A Cornish term of endearment.

## CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER a few days, during which, save for intervals of hearty eating and drinking, I think I did little else but sleep, I was strong enough to leave my bed and lie on a couch by the window, where I enjoyed fully the beauty of the garden and the freshness of the sea. At length I reached the dignity of dressing, and slowly, hour by hour, as health returned, the waves of commonplace daily life gathered in around me, and I grew weary and inert, not being strong enough to take an interest in the petty ebb and flow of that dreary, monotonous sea, and still too sick to seek an interest elsewhere. One day I sat listlessly by the window, weary, sad, irritable. Ah! looking back with these dimmed, aged eyes upon that fragile child figure, propped with pillows, with thin hands clasped and head bent forward, how well I can read now the cause of the dreary depression portrayed in each line of the bent form, of the pallid cheek, and quivering lip! And yet I could not read a word of that language then; my own heart was a sealed book to me. I lived only in imagination, and it was fevered food it gave me. Stones for bread, and scorpions for fish, and fiery thirst for water—these were the daily meals my enemies brought me, and yet I was content, hugging my hunger to me, and craving, ever craving, for the unnatural food.

Still looking back as on a picture, I see the little round table placed near the drooping child, and on it stands a large old-fashioned watch, ticking loudly, so loudly that I—no, not I, Esther the aged, looking back on life's beaten track, knowing all things, and, above all, that nothing hath come to me more cruel than hath come to others, but I, the child, drooping before the unknown mystery of life, bending to the sorrows not yet come, shrinking on the brink of the flood I can feel though not see as fate drives me blindly on—I put my small hand impatiently and push the watch from me; and as I glance wistfully at the window through which these many days at an hour now slowly past—ten, twenty, thirty, fifty minutes since—I had been wont to see a kind face smiling, my head sinks lower, an intense, an unknown weariness pervades my frame, and I hide some strange pang upon my face with my clasped hands. Meanwhile, a figure that has come gently into the room steals behind me, and lays a parcel on my lap.

"Esther, you are sad to day. Here is something that will drive away your precocious troubles."

It was my father's voice, and I turned with a start and deep blush to greet him.

"What is it?" I said, as I laid my hand tremblingly on the packet.

"Open it and see."

In a moment the strings were off, the

papers thrown aside, and there in the full glory of green and gold, lay Spencer's 'Faerie Queen!' For an instant, and an instant only, I was bewildered. Then my face flushed painfully, and, like a wave, there came over me a rush of memory too strong for me in my weakness, for falling softly back on my father's arm, I fainted.

When I recovered consciousness the glittering books were not in sight, and a week passed away before I gathered courage to ask for them. My father hesitated at first to grant my request, but finally yielded, bringing me the volumes with a strange look of uneasiness on his face. I asked no questions, and he volunteered no information. I knew perfectly well from whom the gift came, without a word being said. My silence, however, misled my father, who now attributed my fainting to mere weakness, as he naturally imagined I could only suppose the books came from him.

Meanwhile, throughout this slow week, I kept my daily watch at the window, and listened to the loud ticking of the heavy seconds, as they went by on their leaden wings. It was no hero for whom I was looking and longing; there was no halo of imagination thrown around him. I missed the kind, familiar face—that was simply all. At last I told myself that now I was convalescent he had given me up, just as he would give up any other patient; and disappointed, humiliated, I put away the loud-ticking watch, and altering the position of my chair, I placed my back to the window.

It was not until years after this that I knew my kind doctor at this time was lying dangerously ill, in sore need of the gentle, attentive nursing he had so richly lavished upon me. My father and Prudence, in their anxiety for me during my weakness, avoided all allusion to him, and evaded the half-formed questions that died away on my tongue. Thus silently he faded out of my daily life in the same quiet, unobtrusive way in which he had glided into it. Well would it have been for me if that gentle, kind face could ever have been my daily comforter and help.

You may have observed that I have said nothing about my mother. It was a singular consequence of my illness that it made me avoid, or rather instinctively shrink from, certain persons and certain topics, my thoughts rushing back as they neared them with the same dread with which we flee some visible danger. My mother was one of these persons, and I only approached her image in my memory gradually and with caution, my over-tried brain perchance warning me of peril if I ventured on this path. It was not that my memory was impaired; it was dormant, that was all. I felt that I could remember perfectly all that had happened if I chose to make the effort, but I felt also that it was better not to make it. I could plainly date

the commencement of my illness from my adventure on the roof, but I put my hand on that plague-spot and refused to uncover it. Neither would I ask questions respecting the length and nature of my illness; only I knew it was November when I looked on that white, woful face, and the dead November leaves, like a funeral chapel, still entwined my garden hat; and it was May leaves, May flowers, to which my senses had opened after their long sleep. But my thoughts wandered round that blank darkness without creeping into it, or ever seeking to traverse this lost time which my sickness had swallowed up. This is the blank I told you of—the gulf which my after life has only rudely bridged over, not by any later knowledge of mine, but by the narratives of others.

On my recovery my father seemed a familiar figure that had flitted to and fro through many visions; and that other face, so gentle and kind, to which I clung so tenderly, appeared simply to have belonged to me all my life, and I smiled at the very thought of its ever having been new and strange. Not so my mother: hers was a vague image only to be recalled with pain, and it was the pert servant girl who first forced me to shape out this image tangibly, and endure this pain in a more lasting form than a mere passing pang.

"Well, Miss Esther," she said one day, as her red face beamed with satisfaction, "you don't ask arter Crum'ell's dog?"

"Who in the world is Cromwell's dog, Jenifer?"

"Why, your ma's maid that she brought from Indgee—aule Dominy Chitty, to be sure. And you don't ask after your ma, either, miss."

I turned red, and then pale, with a strange sickness and fear, as this abrupt question stirred up too quickly in my brain the wild thoughts that my illness had for a time calmed.

"No," said I, with a deep sigh, "I had forgotten her. Where is mamma? How is it I don't see her?"

"Aw, my dear," continued Jenifer, pursing her lips tightly together, "et's much good the sight of her would do' ee."

"You must not say so to me," I interrupted wearily.

"Lor, et's much she cares for you!" cried Jenifer. D'rectly the doctor says you has fever she traapeses off to Baath with as many trunks as the queen—a fine new man with a frizzled wig from Lunnun-Churchtown long with her, Crum'ell's dog up behind, four 'osses, two hountriders, a parrot, and Fiddle-de-dee inside."

I could not help laughing, not only at Jenifer's curious arrangement of words, but which she put the horses and outriders

inside the coach, but also at the ridiculous names she had bestowed on my mother's little spaniel, Fidelio, and her maid, Domonica Cetti, who was a Spaniard or Italian, whom she had engaged either in Syria or Egypt.

"And has not mamma been to see me once since I was taken ill, Jenifer?" I asked.

"No, but you've bin to see her, Miss."

"I have, Jenifer!" I exclaimed.

"Ees, fye, my dear. You see, when you got better of the fever, you weren't fitty, at all en your head, Miss Esther, so your pa thought a chaange of air would maaake et come, en coose like, and we all staarts for Baath to try they waeturs, which a dog wouldn't stomach, and tha folks up there so proud and smaert you can't spaake to 'em for emperence, and your ma not a bit settleder, weth her faace paainted. Aw, my dear, she was a rale beauty, I can tell 'ee, and no more cares for her own chıld than a cuckoo. And a young miss weth her, fine and emperant she was, and a beauty, too, they said; but I couldn't see et, n't I, thof I opened my eyes as big as cutch-laamps; and a forthy young gentlemen en brave cloase, most like a play-actor he was."

"Was his name Stephen?" I asked, faintly.

"Stephen! Iss, sure it were, and a deal more tacked arter it, like a kite's tail, and a 'Sir' stuck afore it. And that's all I know about 'un, so don't 'ee, for goodness gracious' sake, Miss Esther, ax me no questions, 'cus I don't know nauthen at all."

"And was the young lady's name Alice, Jenifer?"

"Lor-a-mussy, Miss Esther! you have give me a turn! I reckon 'twas maaake-b'lieve all the time you was ill, and you do know all about et, don't 'ee, now?"

"I know nothing, Jenifer," said I, with deep sadness. "Tell me what you may tell. I see you are ordered not to let me know much."

"You be 'cute as a magpie, Miss Esther. Well, her naame was Alice, but as to her havage, or any thing 'bout her, nobody knowed, and as I couldn't abide her, I didn't want to know. Dominy Chitty said she was a orfing that was put under your mamma's care in Indgee; and ef so be as that's true, than a unbeknown orfing es more cared for than waun's own flesh and blood, that's all. I couldn't abide her, she so rosy and printk out, and you so white and wisht, never ating nauthen, and never slaeping. And aw, my dear, tha things you seed en they waakeful nights would maaake a parson catch oop his coaets and run."

"What did I see, Jenifer?"

Jenifer looked round the room before she spoke, with an awe-struck countenance, but seeing nothing more terrible than the cat, plucked up courage.

"Well miss, perhaps I didn't ought to

<sup>1</sup> In the villages of Devon and Cornwall, "Crum'ell's dog" is a term of reproach bestowed on obnoxious individuals.

tell, but there, as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. You seed, Miss Esther, a bucka which, sooner than I'd see, I'd be repped oop in lerrups or scat ento jouds; iss, fye, I would. You seed Miss Lishy Tremaine groping round your bed day and night. At laest maaster, who was as wisht as a coot, wrote straight off to Miss Mildred, a ded, and he tould her all you said, and, 'stead of answering thic letter, Miss 'Monitia comes to Baath, and taakes you right off to Treval."

"To Treval!" I exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Iss, fye, to Treval, because Miss Mildred send word there warn't no doctor as could pomster<sup>1</sup> you, but she'd cure 'ee herself, she would, and so she did, sure enough."

"Miss Mildred cured me!" And my wonder was too great for words.

"She and the carneying doctor that Mr. Winterdale sent for to furrin paarts."

Here was a new surprise. Mr. Winterdale, then—my old tutor—knew Dr. Spencer, and it was by his agency this firm, gentle hand had so tenderly soothed away my sickness. But I passed over this strange news without a word of exclamation save that expressed in a tightened breath and curious, silent wonder, while Jenifer triumphantly continued her narration:

"Miss Mildred tooked 'ee in hand to once, but she sent me, and Prudence White, and our peer<sup>2</sup> back to Treganowen. And I've heerd say as you slept in her awn room, and she tended 'ee day and night, never leaving 'ee 'cept the hour that the colonel rode over from Treganowen to spend en your room, and then she allis went away, and Miss 'Monitia took her place. At laest the doctor—who maakes everybody like 'un with auney a wink of his gray eye—said you'd be well soon, and they'd better taake 'ee hoam, as you'd feel more nateral like at Treganowen when you comed to. So hoam you was brought, laid upon cushions in the caeridge, as wisht and white as a streak of moonshine, with the doctor as tender-hearted over 'ee as a babby, resting your poor head 'pon his buzzom, coaxing, carneying, whispering till you was jest as quiet and as happy as a infant. Me and Prudence White was in the coach, and maaster riding 'long by the door, and we never tired of looking at thic picture, I can tell 'ee. I never see such a man as thic doctor, he does it all so easy—"

"What does he do easy, Jenifer?"

My voice was so sad when I spoke that it startled me.

"So easy that I'm 'most afeard of 'un," said Jenifer. "He stringed up all our hearts like a score of pilchers, and went off weth 'em as light as a whistle. Miss Esther, I lets the fire go out constant, 'cause of thic

man, and his eyes es in my plate all dennar-time, and my vittles choakes me like fish-bones. If he warn't a gentleman, and I a peor girl, I'd foller 'un out to furrin paerts, and stand at his door all the day, aunly to see 'un pass in waunce. Next to being a lady, Miss Esther, I should like to be a dog—his dog—there, thic's my feelin's, and now I've told 'em out I feels better." And here poor Jenifer regarded me wistfully, rubbing her red, coarse arm the while with nervous fingers. "And all he said 'bout you comed true," she continued. "A few days arter you was brought here, you waakes up as 'cute as ould Solomon hisself. Ah! how he used to bribe me to nuss you well!"

In spite of Jenifer's words appearing to say it, I knew it was not Solomon who had bribed her, so I simply said—

"What did he bribe you with, Jenifer?"

"He had a heap of bribes ready, Miss Esther, to give when you was better—a glad footstep, a sunbeam en his eye, a word like honey which fell down 'pon me, and wrapped me round like the scent of a flower. He paid me a hundred ways—a glint of gould in his sunny hair, a laugh on his handsome faace, a touch from his kind hand, paid me; and less than that, Miss Esther, would have bribed me. For one of his long eyelashes I'd sit up a month of Sundays; for a pleasant word from his lips I'd travel over the world barefoot; and hungry, and poor, and forlorn, I'd die full of reches and joy if he aunly gaave me a thankful look. Ah, he's brimming over weth treasures, he es, which he waasties out 'pon everybody near 'un. O lor! O lor! why aint I a dog?"

Poor Jenifer put the corner of her blue checked apron to her eyes, and looked at me with a half-sorrowful, half-comical glance, in which her own strong common sense seemed struggling against the spell and power of this wonderful doctor.

"And where is he now?" said I, with hot cheeks. "I ask because he was so kind to me, you know, Jenifer?"

"Gone to furrin paarts," said Jenifer, with a burst of tears. "Gone without a leave-taking; gone with a whistle and a song like a blackbird in June; gone like the sun goes, with a promise of being back to-morrow, and, like the sun, he's took the daylight with 'un, and left the night here. Why, he went so careless, saying he'd be back next day, I dunno— Oh, Miss Esther! you who've sat continual in the full feast of his presence, how you've got well wethout 'un in this cowl, dismal darkness, with narra soul in the house to give your heart the bit of bread it's hung'ring for, es more 'n I can tell."

Perhaps I could not tell either, but I uttered no word in reply. My heart and my imagination were already at war, and the battle was fierce. If Jenifer and I had known that our gentle doctor at this moment

<sup>1</sup> Cure.

<sup>2</sup> Pair, a term used by miners to express a party of men working together.

lay sorely wounded, and sick even unto death, hidden in the house of Mr. Winterdale, what then? Why, then I think a certain garland of dead leaves would have been flung out to the summer winds, and a green and golden book would have lost its magic. But this was not to be till I had gathered in my harvest of dust and ashes, and sat down in my desolation many days like the man of Uz.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

I MUSED on this story of my illness which Jenifer related with many details, but by no effort could I remember my stay at Treval, or any other circumstance or person to whom she alluded as having been familiar to me during this terrible blank in my life. Strangely enough, however, now I dared to question myself, I found that all horror at the thought of that terrible figure I had seen on the roof had left me. I could think of it with a curious familiarity that removed all fear, and the mention of Alicia and her mysterious death no longer agitated me so cruelly. On the contrary, I felt an undefinable interest in her fate, and a longing desire to talk of her which I had never experienced before; and added to this, by some link intangible to thought, there was a sick craving in my heart as for something I had lost. The singular idea possessed me that during this blank time of sickness I had enjoyed a larger, fuller life than these days of health gave me now. Things hidden and secret had been open to me; I had ceased to walk gropingly in darkness, battling with shadows, but had known even as I was known. Above all, that haunting duality, that impalpable, fleeing, flitting, second self, of which I have spoken as belonging to my strange, wayward individuality, had found a form—a voice in which it had spoken to me, and opened to my soul a new heaven and a new earth. As my thoughts dwelt on this fancy, hovering unconsciously on the threshold of that secret upon which my life was built up cruelly in blindness, all the love, all the yearning home affections, all the shut-up tenderness of my heart, were stirred within me. More than ever now did I feel as though I—that other mysterious self—had come from some other world, where an atmosphere of love, of sympathy, of light had wrapped me about, which I was ever to search for here darkly and in vain.

In this mood, the craving to talk of Alicia Tremaine grew on me feverishly, but delicacy towards my father, anxious as I was to question him, prevented my pressing for the promised details of her story. I was obliged, therefore, to wreck my restless thoughts of her in a constant recurrence

of her name in my conversations with Prudence White. The good housekeeper at first noticed this uneasily, but at last, one June evening, when we were seated together in a little room high up in the western turret, she suddenly asked if I should like to hear as much of Alicia's history as had come within her own knowledge.

With a hot beating of the heart, mingled with the inexplicable feeling that I knew all she was going to say, I eagerly replied in the affirmative. In the few apologetic and introductory sentences with which I commenced this story, I told you I must present it to you brokenly, as it came to me—rough-shaped and imperfect, growing, as it were, into a building stone by stone. Hence I will not again excuse myself if I give this "servant's tale" just as I wrote it down that night, as nearly as possible in her own language.

Opening a compartment in my old-fashioned bureau, I drew forth the faded yellow paper, and hold it now beneath my hand. The childish characters, unformed, but not feeble, flash upon my aged sight, bringing with them the Esther of that time, the drooping, dreaming, child-girl, so weak, and yet so strong, whose spirit in its changed tenement still looks out from this worn face, and guides this chilled hand. I steal one moment's pause for thought, a moment which brings me my whole life, and reveals sorrows, shadows, depths in my soul which only the "Searcher of hearts" can read; for to no human being is given the power of showing his *whole* life to another—no not even by the most elaborate building of words—as 'we see it ourselves in that instantaneous flash of light which a sudden remembrance of youth illumines in the caves of memory.

This moment past, I dismiss my long-journeying, crowding thoughts with an old woman's smile which is half a sigh; and now I shall transcribe the faded narrative word for word.

*"Some account of Miss Alicia Tremaine and my own family, related to me by Prudence White, 10th June, 1805. N. B. We were in the little blue chamber in the turret that faces the setting sun."*

"Your dear papa, Miss Esther, was engaged to be married to Miss Mildred. It was an old story in the family, their love-making: it began in the days when the admiral, your grandfather, who was as fierce as a firebrand, was hard upon his son because he wouldn't go to sea. The boy took after his mother, who was a Miss Penstrethick, of Tregarthen, and as good and gentle a lady as ever plucked a flower. And she, in her quiet way, set the child against the sea by telling of the awful swearing and wicked-



ness they big ships too often sails along with, till maybe God's judgment reaches 'em in the tempest, or His hand pulls 'em down on the hidden rocks. Well, your grandfather would curse dreadful when he heard his wife talk like this, and he'd ask who was to fight the French if the sailors was to be made parsons of, and he'd like to know what good a praying sailor would be to his country; that if an old salt did his duty in the ship, hated the French, drank his grog, and fought like the devil, he might defy Davy Jones, and leave preaching to the chaplain.

"All this talk and disputing made bitterness grow up between father and son, more especial as my lady took her boy's side, seeming to fear a seafaring life for him with a sort of superstitious dread. Moreover, no one could help seeing that she didn't wish her son to resemble his father in any thing, not even in profession. Too true, the admiral had been a wild man in his day, and strange tales of his past life floated into our ears at times. When he was captain, which was long afore my time, his elder brother met his death in a way which made many a terrible whisper wander round this old place. The elder had the Towers and all the land, while the younger was but badly off, and as he was wild and extravagant, he felt his poverty bitter hard. Some say he asked his brother for money and got plenty, some say he was refused in a cruel way. At all events, when the captain's ship put in at Plymouth his brother went to see him, and the two met often, but whether in anger or in love none knew. At last, one night late, a message came from the captain begging his brother to come aboard to see him, for his vessel was ordered off to join the rest of the fleet, and would weigh anchor at sunrise. So the gentleman goes, and he was seen to get into the ship's boat waiting for him at the stairs, but he was never seen again alive. His body was found floating off Bovisand six days afterwards, and was recognized by his servants and steward, and took down to Treganowen, where 'twas buried in great state.

"The captain's ship was far out at sea then, and letters were long in reaching him, but when at last he heard the news he wrote back, seeming much surprised at his brother's death, saying he had left the ship alive and well at twelve at night in a shore boat rowed by two men; that he had hailed them himself from the deck, and the captain said he thought he should know these two men again, and he begged they might be searched for. The officers on watch, and some of the crew who were on deck, saw the squire depart, and corroborated this statement, but there were very few among them who noticed the men in the shore boat; hence, when the ship returned, after three years' absence, it is no wonder that

among the crowd of boatmen in Plymouth Dock,<sup>1</sup> they failed to recognize those two. Meanwhile, too, though many an honest man at first was took up on suspicion, the circumstance had faded away in people's minds, and every one was more willing to welcome the captain—he was commodore now—than bewail his brother. He came back with French prizes, and had took his part gallantly in the war, so all mouths were full of his praise. And besides, so many of his crew had seen Squire Treganowen leave the ship, that I doubt if ever a whisper would have got abroad against him, if it hadn't been for a drunken old lieutenant, whom the admiral kept in clover to the day of his death, and he used to hint a story which, bit by bit, as I picked it up in scraps, and patched it into one, grew together much like this.

"And before I tell it, Miss Esther, it is only fair to say that this lieutenant was as crazed a Jeremy-pattic as ever I see. He died mazed with drink, and even when his poor head wasn't betwattled and roadling<sup>2</sup> through drunkenness, it was but a chuckle-head at best. Here's the story:

"The captain and his brother met like friends, and drank deep in the cabin till the gentleman, whose wine was helped with something stronger, lay like one dead on the floor. Then the lieutenant, who had kept himself sober, went and fetched from without a crowd of pressed men then lying in irons, a young fellow somewhat resembling the squire. This man's fury and rage on being brought aboard the day before by the pressgang had been so great that he struck an officer, upon which he was instantly condemned by the captain to suffer more lashes the next day than his life could have escaped from. This man they dressed in Squire Treganowen's clothes, and then they hailed the shore boat and put him in it, he right glad to escape his punishment, and to gain the heavy sum with which the captain bribed him. How this man died that night none ever knew. There was no money in the pockets of those brave clothes found on the disfigured corpse at Bovisand, but the diamond buckles were in the shoes, the heavy gold watch in the fob, the signet-ring on his finger, and these with the clothes were sufficient to his servants and friends to identify the drowned man with Squire Treganowen. Whether he died through the sin of those two men in the boat, or whether his death lies on the admiral's soul, I know not.

"In the morning his unfortunate brother found himself in irons among a crowd of men recently pressed. He raved at first furiously, but the marine on guard thought it nothing strange that a man who was mad yesterday, should be still madder to-day. The only wonder in the ship was that the

<sup>1</sup> Now Devonport.

<sup>2</sup> Wandering.

captain should have had the man brought to his cabin the night before by the second-lieutenant; but as the sentry who told this story, with the addition of the prisoner being brought back two hours after excessively drunk was certainly what sailors call 'three sheets in the wind' himself, he was not much heeded. Meanwhile, the wretched man, in ragged garments and in irons, after a few ravings, sank down quite bedoled,<sup>1</sup> and a sort of deadness<sup>2</sup> came over him through sea-sickness, and, maybe, the drugged wine he'd took. He lied in that shape<sup>3</sup> some days, and I can't tell you what happened in that while. Pressed men were cruelly treated in them days, Miss Esther, and perhaps foul air, ill-usage, and horror turned the poor gentleman's brain. At all events, he fell ill of fever, and when he rose up from that sickness he was not the same man he had been. He was but a poor palched<sup>4</sup> body, and he seemed betwattled<sup>5</sup> like; so when he called himself Ralph Treganowen the sailors only laughed, and told him they had seen the captain's brother in his brave suit of plum-colored velvet depart in a shore boat at twelve at night. The lieutenant said he'd took up this delusion through having seen the squire in the captain's cabin that night, and Mr. Treganowen had spoke kindly to him, and begged him off his punishment. Every one believed that stram,<sup>6</sup> and the miserable man himself grew so silent and mazed that even he didn't contradict it. Perhaps he had some scheme in his head of escape and vengeance when they should reach land, but the ship kept at sea for months; then they cruised off some islands in a hot sea—I can't tell you where, Miss Esther, because I'm no scolar—and here the men hoped to go ashore, but the captain refused all leave, and a terrible mutiny broke out among the crew. Two officers were killed afore the captain, and them among the sailors who stood fast, overcame the mutineers. Among the worst of these was that silent, half-mad, fever-stricken wretch, who sometimes called himself Ralph Treganowen.

"The guilty men were taken out of the captain's hands, and lodged in jail in the islands. They were tried, and sentenced to be hanged. They hang folks now, Miss Esther, in plenty, but five-and-thirty years ago, when this happened, they hanged more; and hanged these men were, sure enough, though I have heard say the captain made frantic efforts to save the poor pattic' who called himself his brother.

"The captain was too ill, from a severe

<sup>1</sup> Stupefied with pain or grief.

<sup>2</sup> Faintness.

<sup>3</sup> State.

<sup>4</sup> From palch (Cornish), mending poorly from sickness.

<sup>5</sup> Turned childish.

<sup>6</sup> Story.

<sup>7</sup> Simpleton.

wound got in the fight, to give evidence; but there was plenty of witnesses to the mutiny and murder of the two officers besides him; so his voice was not wanted to hang the mutineers.

"The poor pattic was ill again in the over-crowded, vile jail, where the blazing heat so added to the prisoners' sufferings that they all raved for death, and said blasphemously that hell would be a happy change. In such a place, if the miserable man's clouded wits would have let him tell his tale clearly, no one would have listened; but some glimmer of family pride in his poor addled brain made him now as anxious to be silent as he had ever been to speak.

"It was when all hope of saving him from the gallows was quenched that the letter came to the captain on his sick-bed. Many days during the trial he lay insensible, telling of his brother being drowned, and his body found at Bovisand, and buried in all honor at Treganowen.

"When the lieutenant was very drunk, he would say that this news was sent to the man in jail, who had then but four hours to live, and it comforted him to know the family name wouldn't be disgraced through him. The lieutenant used to hint darkly of a letter sent back to the captain, written in this awful time before his execution, when the gallows was hungering for the poor wretch, saying that Treganowen Towers, so unjustly won, should pass out of his brother's hands in bloodshed, as he had gained it. The ink in that letter was still wet when the unhappy writer was hanged in the name of the young man whose place he had taken in the ship.

"The captain for long after was like a madman, and when he got well he rushed into the thick of the war, and fought like a man possessed with the fiend. On his return home to rank, wealth, and honor, all peace and joy seemed to forsake him. The love between him and his young wife and son shrank up, and withered, and died away. They lived beneath the same roof, but madam's rooms were in the west tower, and the admiral's in the east, and they never met save for some cold necessity of business, or for some formal politeness when strangers were by.

"The old lieutenant—a rough, sour man, who had risen from before the mast, kept the admiral company, and perhaps I gleaned more of this tale from their disjointed talk than from any actual revealings of the old drunkard.

"It can't do any harm to speak of these things to you, Miss Esther, now they are all gone dead and past; and I tell you that you may see Treganowen was no happy household, and you cannot wonder your father, as a lad, strolled over as often as he could to Treval, which was as cheerful then as 'tis gloomy now, for Sir Theobald and his lady

loved company, and then their young daughters were called, the red, white, and pink roses, so beautiful were they and happy."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Miss MILDRED was the white rose, and she and your father seemingly loved each other dearly. The admiral's lady was glad, and the marriage was settled to take place when her son came of age, no one gainsaying it except his father, who still swore Mr. Ralph should go to sea, and only marry when he'd licked the French like a man. Still the lad stayed at home, and things went on as usual till Lady Tremaine fell sick, and that was the beginning of troubles. The doctors said she must go to a warm climate, and in much sorrow Sir Theobald prepared for his departure, there being great talk at first of all her daughters going with her; but Miss Mildred, natural enough, didn't like to leave her lover, Mr. Ralph being 'most demented at the thought of it, and Miss Admonitia being like her sister's shadow, going where she went and staying where she stayed; so it ended with only Miss Alicia, the youngest, departing with her mother.

"She was not sixteen then, and the sweetest child that eye could see, though wilful as a pixy.

"Well, Sir Theobald travelled with his wife and daughter and an old relation of hers to Italy, and then, leaving them comfortably settled, he came home. But the anxiety of this long sickness hung over Treval like a heavy cloud, and now her mother was away Miss Mildred began to fret that she hadn't gone with her. More especial did she grieve when letters came with ill news of the invalid, and at such times your father would return from Treval in a gloomy temper. Perhaps Miss Mildred now, in her anxiety and self-reproach, felt less pleasure in the presence of the lover for whose sake and at whose entreaties she had stayed at home. And maybe she let Mr. Ralph see this too plainly. At all events, sharp words came between their love now at times, and the young man was chafed, and fretted.

"About six months after Lady Tremaine's departure that ghastly, oogle old lieutenant died awful. All the house was woke up in the night by shrieks like the screeches of some one in torments. If Tregeagle had broke loose from Dozmarepool he couldn't howl worse. We started from our beds, and met each other on the staircases and passages, some with lights and some without, and all asking what was the matter, and none able to tell, till all of a sudden there rushed by us a figure with a wild look as if he was *hunted* by something, and we

saw 'twas the lieutenant. In a minute, as he stared behind him, not at us, there came out of his throat a yell of pain and horror such as I hope never to hear again. No need to ask now where the screeches come from. We all cried out he was mad, and we women held back terrified, while the men went arter him as hard as they could tear.

"My lady, standing at the door in her long white dress, as pale as ashes, cried out to us to catch him afore he did himself some harm. The admiral coming from the other side of the house, rushed up one staircase with two men, while the rest dashed up another. But the madman kept ahead, and got into a little room at the very top of the east tower, where master had a lot of curiosities stowed away, and here he banged the door and locked it in their faces. With all their strength put forth, it was five minutes before the stout oak gave way, and then, with the moonlight gleaming on him, they saw him for one instant at the window; the next, and he had sprung out, and was whirling in the air down to the court below, and there his brains were scattered on the stones.

"This event sobered the admiral a good deal. He was afraid to drink as he had done, and he grew more reasonable and kind. There was nothing more said about Mr. Ralph going to sea, and his father spoke to Sir Theobald about the marriage, and agreed it should take place when his son was of age. So now he and Miss Mildred were openly engaged, and all the country side talked of the coming wedding.

"Meanwhile, it was thought Lady Tremaine was getting better, and there was hope of her coming home, and Miss Mildred and Miss Admonitia wrote and begged her earnestly to return for the wedding. There was great rejoicing through the country when Mr. Ralph came of age, and the marriage only waited Lady Tremaine's arrival. The poor lady got as far as Paris on her journey, and there she died quite sudden. Sir Theobald, who had gone to fetch her, wrote home to tell of it, and bade all the tenants come and meet the body at Falmouth, for he was going to bring her to Treval to be buried. It was a grand funeral, sure enough, but it's not of that I've got to tell, but of the change that came over Miss Mildred.

"From the day she heard the news she shut herself up, and would see no one. She seemed like one bedoled, and never spoke except to utter some bitter self-reproach. Her mother's death she thought lay at her door; Alicia, she said, was a giddy thing who knew nothing, and if she had gone to Italy in her stead to nurse her mother, she wouldn't have died. Or if she had not hurried her home for the wedding she might have lived for years in that soft climate.

Thus she went on, and the evening they brought Lady Tremaine's corpse to Treval, Miss Mildred stood by the coffin white as snow, and when your father, whom she had refused to see for days, came and took her hand, she broke out into bitter words, saying her great love for him was an idolatry to which she had sacrificed all duties, and for her punishment he would live to work her fearful woe. She knew this, she said, because she had learned to know his nature better than he knew it himself, and in always yielding to his ever selfish, ever-changing demands, she had only fostered his imperiousness and fickleness, and it would be hers to gather in the fruit.

"All this she uttered only in grief and passion clinching her words by a wild vow that for her mother's sake she would do penance, and punish herself by not seeing his face for three months. He knew she spoke in haste and anguish, and he was willing to forgive her words against him, but he could not forget them. And time after time he rode over to Treval dull and sad, only to return home irritated and chafed by her strange persistence in refusing to see him. Even Miss Admonitia was hard upon him, accusing him of selfishness when he grew angry, and saying it was his counsel to Mildred which had made her refuse to go to Italy with her mother, and his will, his wishes, had ever been Mildred's law, and the least he could do now was to be patient and bear with her grief, though it had taken a wilful shape. But this was the first time that any act of Mildred's had hurt him, so he was not patient, and when six weeks had gone by without her once relaxing in her strange penance—surely the hardest to her, poor lady, that she could inflict upon herself—he left Treganowen angrily, and went up to Bath.

"Now when Sir Theobald returned, people had wondered Miss Alicia was not with him, but soon it came out that the old lady, his relation, had begged so hard that she might stay with her another year that he had consented. So she stopped at Paris; then, as months and months went gloomily by at Treganowen and Treval—for Mr. Ralph did not come home when Miss Mildred's penance was over, and she was too proud to ask him—we heard of her in London, amid lots of gay doings, which sounded strange to us at these two sad houses. For Sir Theobald was a broken man since his wife's death, seeing no one save his two elder daughters in their sable garments; and as for us here, the admiral had grown into an old man, quite querulous and feeble, and my lady was always quiet, and mostly helpless.

"At last, pining for her son, she drove over to Treval, and had a long interview with Miss Mildred. . . . was more her friend

than her servant, so she read to me the letter she wrote to Mr. Ralph on her return, begging him to come home, for Mildred was sorry she had pained him, and entreated his forgiveness. But Mr. Ralph had a haughty temper, and he could not so easily forget his anger. It was long before he wrote, and then his letter was short and hurried. He could not return just yet, he said; he had made promises and engagements to friends which could not be broken. Mildred should have thought of this before she drove him away from Treval. His love for her had kept him at home continually, and he had seen nothing of the world; but now his leading-strings were broken, and he must see something of life before he settled down. He remarked confidentially to his mother that Mildred had defects in her character, but he had loved her too much to heed them till they had been set in array against himself; but now he thought it best, for his own happiness and for hers, to show her he was not a man to play the patient servant and lover forever. He added, in what I thought a reckless tone, that they had better be married at once when he returned home; and he prayed his mother to get Mildred to fix the period of their marriage, for, in order to prove to her that he too could be obstinate, he was resolved not to see her face till their wedding-day was fixed.

"This was a strange, harsh, wild letter to show to Miss Mildred, and my mistress, having no one else to take counsel with, asked me if she should let her see it or not. I was frightened at the thought, and begged her not; but she, it seems, held a different opinion, for she went to Treval, and by her tears when she returned I knew the interview had been a painful one. She told me that night that she had never seen Miss Mildred so humble, and that Ralph need not fear the future, for her love for him was so great and wonderful that for her part she only dreaded that his wife would be too much a slave to his caprices.

"Shortly afterwards we heard that Miss Mildred had left her seclusion, and was again receiving visits. Then I knew from my mistress that she had written a heart-rending letter to Mr. Ralph, entreating his compassion and forgiveness for her strange mood, and imploring his speedy return, saying timidly she would fix a period for their marriage when he came.

"Now your father, Miss Esther, was young and thoughtless, and perhaps he had been hardly used by this proud young lady, or maybe he was tired of a courtship that had already lasted too long, and demanded too many sacrifices of him. At all events, he wrote to his mother to say that for three months Miss Mildred had refused to see his face, disregarding all his entreaties; and now, he scarcely knew why, but he was sick and weary, and little inclined to heed

hers. Nevertheless, he prayed his mother to get the wedding fixed as early as possible, for his state of mind now would bear no uncertainty. He would see Mildred again as her husband, but not as her lover; that part of his life was over.

"I believe this strange, contradictory letter was but lover's play, and perhaps a little of the insolences of youth and delight of a new power, but it went to Miss Mildred's heart. I never knew what he wrote to her, but she made no more scruples in fixing her wedding; only she prepared for it sadly, and with a heavy foreboding on her mind.

"Now all this time Miss Alicia was still away; and they had letters from her great-aunt, saying how happy she was, and how little call there was to have her home; but suddenly, about a month before the wedding, Alicia herself wrote from Bath to say she was coming back to her dear old home; and, sure enough, a few days afterwards here she was, upsetting Treval House with her new-fashioned ways.

"It was just three years and a half since she had gone away, and if she was a pretty child then, she was a lovely and accomplished woman now. She could do lots of things that Miss Admonitia and Miss Mildred knew nothing of. She could speak foreign tongues, she could sing like an angel, and make such music come out of the old harpsichord at Treval that the very birds stopped at the windows to listen. Then she could dance like a fairy—new dances never seen before in these parts—and all her gowns were made in the latest fashion; and her maid dressed her hair so high with bows and side-curls, and bits of lace and jewels, that she was sparkling and radiant to look at. No wonder the folks left talking of Miss Mildred's pale beauty, and Miss Admonitia's stateliness, to rave only of the damask rose freshly blooming at Treval.

## CHAPTER XX.

"Miss ALICIA had been home about a week and all the country side was full of talk of her—the ladies borrowing her fashions, and even Miss Mildred altering her wedding-gowns to the new modes—when Mr. Ralph, with two servants, rides home unexpected, in such hot haste that he took but one day to come from Plymouth to Treganowen. The horses were covered with foam and mud, the servants fagged out; but Mr. Ralph scarcely stopped to kiss his mother before he vaulted on the back of a fresh horse, and was off to Treval.

"My poor lady, who was an angel of goodness, rejoiced, and said to me that night, with tears in her eyes—

"Surely, Prudence, I shall see my dear boy now married and happy before I die. I knew it was only a lover's quarrel between him and Mildred. She loves him most dearly."

"I scarcely knew how to answer her, for the two new serving-men from Bath had been talking strange things below, and when we told of our young master's coming marriage they had laughed, and said 'twas no wonder Mr. Ralph had followed his beautiful betrothed in such hot speed. The other servants were at pains to set them right, and explain that Miss Alicia was not the bride; but I said nothing, for such a strange feeling of horror and pain nipped my heart that it came upon me all of a sudden that grief was seething for us all.

"I cannot tell you, Miss Esther, what passed at Treval. I only know that here we servants whispered together that Mr. Ralph's looks were not those of a bridegroom. He would ride home from Treval in a fury, like one escaping for his life, but only to gallop back there again in an hour with a pale face and set lips. Meanwhile, all the preparations for the wedding went on. The family jewels which the old admiral had sent to Paris to be reset came home in the hands of a special messenger; and then the state coach was ordered out, and my lady and the admiral went in great pride to Treval, and presented them to Miss Mildred, in a splendid case, engraved with her new name that was to be.

"When the coach was starting there was a great cry for Mr. Ralph, but he was nowhere to be found. However, when they reached Treval he was found easy enough, leaning over Miss Alicia's harpsichord, while she sang in one of those foreign tongues her sisters couldn't understand. There were many guests in the state drawing-room, and Miss Mildred kept up bravely before them all; but as they slipped away, so her courage went, till at last, when no one was by, save her father, her elder sister, the admiral, and his wife—for Miss Alicia had gone to the hall-door to speed the parting guests, and Mr. Ralph followed her—then she fell on her knees, and spoke out her bitter grief; then she implored my lady to take back the jewels and keep them for her son's wife, for she should never be that happy woman. And she pointed to her sister and her lover going by the window, smiling, arm-in-arm.

"The old admiral rose in a fury, and Sir Theobald wept, for his youngest daughter was to him the apple of his eye, and my lady, standing between them, wrung her hands, her heart yearning towards her son, though she loved Mildred too, while Alicia seemed to her a foolish foreign girl, full of airs and graces.

"They all gathered round Miss Mildred,

and kissed and comforted her, striving to persuade her that her poor jealous heart was mistaken; but Sir Theobald held aloof, with his eyes fixed on the window, through which he saw the figure of his youngest daughter, radiant in grace and loveliness.

"I shall never forget that night. Mr. Ralph came home late, and was summoned instantly to his father's room. No word of their whispered talk passed through the closed doors, but, the interview over, the young man came out, white and ghastly as the shadow of death, and went straight to his mother's chamber. She, seemingly, could give him no comfort, and he left her like one in despair. The poor lady called me to her in a voice of anguish, as his step sounded through the corridor, but there were secrets in her heart too heavy for speech, and she could only spend her grief in prayers and tears.

"The next day the old admiral wandered about like a man haunted, muttering to himself, and lifting his stick in the air, as though striking at phantoms. Towards the afternoon we saw with astonishment the Treval coach and outriders coming up the avenue. From an upper window I watched to see whom the carriage brought. It was Sir Theobald, who since his wife's death, had scarce crossed his own threshold, and who now, as the steps were let down, descended with the feeble gait of a man crushed and broken. He remained closeted with the admiral an hour, and, somehow, a whisper grew around us that he was come to pray him to substitute one sister's name for the other in the marriage settlements. Then Mr. Ralph was sent for, and strange to say, he was found in the church standing with folded arms before the heavy monument erected to the memory of his uncle. He seemed lost in thought, and when the servant touched him on the shoulder, he turned round with a start, repeating wildly—

"'Drowned off Bovisand!—drowned off Bovisand! A sad tale, John,' he said to the man, as if rallying his courage; 'but, after all, it's better to be drowned than hanged.'

"And then he laughed so loud that the old church echoed through and through with the sound.

"He strode back through the park, moodily, and sprang up the east tower stairs to the room where his father and Sir Theobald were sitting. The interview was soon over, and I saw the baronet go away with a face more shrunk, more careworn, than ever. And now again, by some strange means, a whisper crept through the house that Mr. Ralph stood honorably to his engagement with Miss Mildred, and the marriage was to take place at once. Somehow his figure filled up our minds in a greater

way after this, and there wasn't one of us that didn't serve him with heartier good-will and respect, mingled with a sort of tender pity, for truly we saw the young man was sick almost to death with grief.

"And now all was bustle and preparation—lawyers coming and going with red-taped parcels—friends and cousins journeying from all parts—servants and mantua-makers at their wits end. In the midst of this, who should present himself on a sorry horse but Mr. Winterdale."

"Mr. Winterdale!" I exclaimed, interrupting Mrs. White's narrative with astonishment.

"Yes, Miss Esther. He came all the way from London only to look on Miss Alicia's face again, with scarce even the hope of receiving more from her than a civil recognition at church. He found a poor lodging at Treval Church-town, and he watched Mr. Ralph and the three sisters hour by hour as they walked about in the grounds at Treval, or flitted from window to window in the old mansion.

"At last came the day before the wedding, and many papers and parchments were signed at Treval by the admiral and the bride and bridegroom. The admiral came home in good spirits, and, as he walked up and down on the terrace, striking his stick on the ground, I heard him mutter—

"'Outdone their prophecies this time! The hanged man's curse drops short—'What was gained by blood shall be lost through blood.' Ah, ah!—shall it? Why, if I give away the old Towers myself, I don't see how blood can take them away!'

"So he muttered, and to this day I cannot understand his words.

"The next morning—the wedding morning—rose upon us like the day of doom. The tardy sun shone down upon two houses plunged in horror and desolation.

"It was scarcely light when a hoarse voice from without bade us undo the door. On obeying, we found a horseman from Treval, haggard with terror and hard riding. In trembling accents he told his tale.

"Treval had been broken into. The wedding jewels were taken from Miss Mildred's bedside, where they lay on a small table, plate and money were stolen, two servants were found gagged and tied; but these evils were nothing: the crowning anguish was that Miss Alicia was missing.

"The weary day went on, and in vain all question, all search and grief—no tidings, no clue reached the wretched inmates of Treval and Treganowen.

"There were no marks of violence on window or door, only the shutter of the dining-room window, behind which a narrow staircase leads to a small cellar, was found partly off its hinges, as though it had been opened with too rough a strength. Constables and magistrates visited the place

and questioned the servants, but still all remained a mystery. The two men whom the burglars had seized related, with all the exaggeration of fright, the appearance of an armed gang in black masks, and with feet unshod, creeping stealthily upon them in the dead of night. The other inmates of the house had heard, had seen nothing; Miss Mildred alone, with a countenance ghastly pale, recounted how her sister, who had not spoken to her for many days, had entered her room—she knew not at what hour—and stooped over her and kissed her, whispering, 'Be happy, Mildred, if you can.' And then she had stolen away as silently as she came.

"Days passed on thus in ghastly emptiness, no tidings of the lost lady reaching us. Mr. Ralph was like a man suddenly struck by some great horror, fiercer, more tormenting than madness. He rode to and fro incessantly between Treganowen and Treval, his pale face like a spectre's, and his horse's flanks covered with the foam of spurring. But in all these visits he refused cruelly to see Miss Mildred, though Miss Admonitia prayed him on her knees, and though the bereaved father besought him even with tears.

"Another week of anguish, and then the reason became too plain why he would not look on the face of his promised bride, or listen to her passionate pleadings and grief. At the end of that week Mr. Winterdale—the stranger from London, whose silent, hopeless love for Miss Alicia had been the talk of the country side—presented himself here, and asked for the admiral. His pallid countenance, haggard with grief and watching, and bristling, as it were, with some secret horror, scared me as I conducted him to my master's presence. Before I shut the door I had heard his words:

"Sir, you are a magistrate. I demand from you a warrant for the apprehension of Miss Mildred Tremaine for the murder of her sister."

As Prudence spoke these words, I started from my seat and seized her by the hand. A strange hallucination came over me. It appeared to me that I was familiar already with these terrible events, and was only listening to a twice-told tale. The whole story, and more, infinitely more, than Prudence could tell, presented itself to my mind as something I knew fully, yet could not express, for it passed through my thoughts like a shadow eluding my grasp. There even came dimly into my brain the fancy that a knowledge of Miss Alicia's fate, with every mystery cleared away, lay there within my consciousness, if I could but seize and gather it up. But the clue, the light was wanting, and sinking back in my chair, prescient of what was coming, and yet unable to tell a word of it, I bade Prudence in a faint voice continue her narrative.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"THE admiral refused the warrant with stubborn heat, upon which Mr. Winterdale strode away white with anger, but only to return shortly with Mr. Ralph, who, in a louder tone than his, and with fiercer determination, reiterated his demand for the apprehension of Miss Mildred Tremaine.

"I doubt if the admiral would have yielded to the fury of these two young men if his son had not threatened that he would apply to another magistrate. Then he complied partially, and it was agreed that Miss Mildred should be informed of the suspicions against her, and she and the witnesses who accused her should be examined privately at Treval before the admiral and two other justices, friends of the family.

"My mistress, whose womanly kindness gave her strength, went with me early to Treval, and broke the news gently to Miss Mildred before the magistrates arrived. But, told her ever so gently, the accusation was terrible, and never shall I forget the anguish of that poor young lady as she listened to the tale, and heard that her promised husband was her fiercest accuser.

"I have seen a bird beat himself to death against the bars of his cage—in an agony of fear, and I can compare Miss Mildred's terror to nothing but this. She turned her head wildly from side to side, like a poor hunted creature seeking help, and finding none. Then she cast herself down at Mrs. Treganowen's feet, and in piteous accents implored her to say if there was no escape; no succor on either hand. Her extreme terror made my mistress uneasy, and she kept repeating—

"But you are innocent, Mildred; then what have you to fear?"

"Miss Mildred did not seem to care to assert her innocence—perhaps she was too proud. She looked up at Mrs. Treganowen with wild eyes, her young face blanched to a deathly whiteness, while she said in a despairing voice—

"What will my innocence avail me? I would rather be guilty since Ralph accuses me: that would justify him."

"Rather be guilty! rather be the murderer of your sister!" exclaimed my mistress, in horror. "Mildred, you don't know what you are saying."

"Murdered!" repeated Miss Mildred. "Who says Alicia is murdered? She is alive, and doubtless well and happy in her way," she added, in a tone of scorn.

"As she made this cruel speech on the hapless young girl, helpless in the hands of robbers, I looked at her, half hoping grief had partly turned her brain, but her proud, white, beautiful face showed no signs of a disordered wit; it was quivering with anguish in every nerve, and heavy tears rested on her long lashes—signs of bitterness, but not of a

crazed mind. As I looked, all my pity seemed to creep away from Miss Alicia to wander hitherwards, and rest upon that poor stricken head. Acting by some sudden impulse, and forgetting that I was only a servant, I went and knelt down by her side.

"Miss Mildred," said I, 'you are speaking truth. Wherever Miss Alicia is, she is happier than you, for she is not falsely accused, or unjustly hated, or spitefully entreated by them she loves. No; she is worshipped, lamented, wept for, and she carries with her the heart of your lover, and all your life, your honor, and happiness.'

"With a great cry Miss Mildred flung her arms round my neck as I spoke, but she never uttered one word, and I felt by the trembling of her slight body that words were utterly useless here, and were never made for such grief as hers.

"She has always liked me since that day, though neither she nor I have ever spoken of it.

"Mildred," said my mistress in a trembling voice, 'if you know your sister is alive, why not say so to your father, and to— to Ralph?'

"Miss Mildred looked up with a passionate gleam in her eyes. All this while she had been kneeling on the floor at Mrs. Treganowen's feet, but she moved a little way from her now as she said—

"To Ralph? No, I will never mention Alicia's name to him! Tell my father? No, it is better he should believe Alicia murdered than think what I think. I have my mother's death on my conscience: I will not kill my father, too.'

"With that she crouched down lower on the floor, and hid her face in her hands, never stirring till the door opened. Then she sprang up in such wild terror, and clutched Mrs. Treganowen by the gown in such pitiful, childlike fear that my heart bled for her.

"Are they come to take me to prison?' she said. 'Oh, I am no murderess! I have not killed Alicia—I could not kill any one! Oh, don't let them touch me!—don't let them touch me!'

"She clung to my mistress without looking round, and all this while it was Mr. Ralph standing at the door. I was sobbing and could not speak.

"Ralph," said his mother—and her voice trembled exceedingly—'this is cruel; this is unlike a gentleman. Leave us instantly.'

"The justices wait,' he answered, coldly, 'and I thought you would rather I told you than another.'

"At the first sound of his voice Miss Mildred turned and stood erect. Her face flushed crimson; then the blood rushing back to her heart left her white as marble.

At sight of the man she loved, her wild terror, which had seemed so helpless, so desperate—like the fear of a snared bird, or the agony of a beaten child in the hands of a cruel master—suddenly passed away, and as she turned her proud, pale face towards him, no one would have pitied her now.

"She was full of courage, of determination, of hope. Her cheeks shone with a light I had never seen on them before, and her eyes were bright with some strange joy and tenderness.

"I am ready,' she said, quickly. Then she added, in a tone trembling with yearning love, 'Ralph, you should have come earlier. I had need of courage. The sight of you has given it.'

"Embarrassed by her manner, yet too blinded by his own grief to feel the full generosity of her words, he was turning away from the door when Miss Admonitia entered. She thrust him out of her way as she would a reptile, with a passionate hate and scorn that knew no measure, and walked straight up to her sister's side.

"Mildred, we will go together,' she said, 'before these justices. Wheresoever they take you I will go also.'

"She drew herself up, and waived Mr. Ralph from the door.

"Will you make room for us to pass, miserable traitor?' she said, scornfully.

"He shrank before her vehement indignation, and turned his face away; but Miss Mildred, releasing her sister's arm, darted forward and stood before him.

"Ralph,' she said—and she held out her little white hand to him—'give me a word of comfort before I go to this bitter ordeal and shame. Say Mr. Winterdale edged you on, and it is not you who first accused me. Oh! say this is some madness, and you do not really think me a murderess!'

"In her earnestness she laid her slender, trembling fingers on his arm, but the silken touch acted on him like fire, and he shook it off cruelly with violent hate and horror as he sprang back with a ghastly look, which too plainly told how guilty he thought her. For one moment she quailed, and her white face took that ashy hue which it wears now always; then she looked at him in bitter sorrow, and, taking her sister's arm, she passed out with a firm step, and walked down the great staircase to the justice-room.

"Mrs. Treganowen, weeping bitterly, hastened after her, passing her son with a look of reproach and pain, but without a word of speech. He stood aside to let us go by, as I, holding my mistress by the arm, assisted her trembling steps. Then he followed us silently, his eyes bent on Miss Mildred's figure with a sort of ravenous eagerness, as if he feared she was going to escape.



## CHAPTER XXII.

"In the justice-room Miss Admonitia and my mistress sat on either side of Miss Mildred, but she scarcely seemed to need their support. Except for her ashy paleness she appeared calm, while Miss Admonitia, on the contrary, visibly found it difficult to restrain her indignation. She flushed continually, and sometimes interrupted the proceedings by some fiery word of contempt or remonstrance. My poor mistress was the most agitated of the three, but she kept silent, only watching her son continually, and wringing her hands when he gave his evidence against Miss Mildred.

"Sir Theobald was not present. He lay on his bed in dangerous sickness. His daughters had watched by him the whole night, and Miss Admonitia had only quitted him to place herself by her sister's side during this fearful hour.

"Mr. Winterdale was the first witness examined. It appeared this unhappy young man was in the habit of prowling round the house and grounds at Treval in the hope of feasting his eyes for a moment on the object of his hopeless love. Hidden behind trees, in arbors, and among clumps of shrubs, he had been a witness to many a sorrowful interview between the sisters. He had heard cruel threats, and longings for vengeance, and bitter hate, and hard words enough to hang a dozen; but what went the furthest to implicate Miss Mildred were the secret meetings which he had watched between her and a man of coarse and ruffianly aspect, a stranger in these parts, and who it was proved had been seen with the dashing and handsome scoundrel supposed to be the captain of the band. As Mr. Winterdale gave this evidence those present who believed in Miss Mildred's innocence grew uneasy, and many significant looks passed between them.

"Then Mr. Ralph was called, and although in some respects he was a most unwilling witness, answering all questions relating to his past love for Mildred, and his present passionate affection for Alicia with reluctance, still enough was elicited to show that Miss Mildred had cause to hate her sister, and was anxious to be rid of her. On one point Mr. Ralph gave evidence eagerly. He proved that Miss Mildred had been the first to miss her sister, and make earnest search for her through the house, her terror and anguish during this time being apparently unfeigned, but he was grieved to say he had reason afterwards to think them insincere, for when all hope of finding Alicia was over she broke out into bitter invectives against her, and gave vent to expressions of contempt, and unnatural hate that appalled her listeners. He also related the story Miss Mildred had told him of her sister's visit to her chamber in the

night, and how, by an accident, he had discovered this story to be entirely false, and had thus been first led to suspect her as an accomplice in Alicia's abduction.

"He sat down after thus speaking, and looked steadily at his mother, though his face was blanched to the hue of death. Doubtless he felt bitterly the cruel part he was taking, and yet would not shrink from what he considered his duty.

"Call Sarah Tregellas," said one of the magistrates hastily, as though glad to break the painful silence.

"A sinister-looking woman of about fifty came forward and answered to her name.

"I knew her, and had never liked her much. She had been Lady Tremaine's maid, and had gone abroad with her, being much trusted by the family; but she was of a vindictive temper, as all her fellow-servants at Treval too well knew.

"In answer to questions she proved that she had that night a quarrel with Martha, Miss Mildred's maid, whose room she always shared, and that in the heat of her passion she went down to complain to Miss Mildred, but when she got into the sitting-room, which communicated with that young lady's chamber, she thought better of it, but being unwilling to return to her bed where Martha was, she made up her mind to sleep on the sofa in this room. Accordingly she locked the door, that she might not be surprised by the servants in the morning, and she found the door still locked when she was awake by the cry of the robbery. Thus it was impossible any one could have entered Miss Mildred's apartment, as the only entrance to it was through the sitting-room. Miss Mildred was still up when she established herself on the sofa. There was a light in her room, and she was moving about. Martha, who had been assisting her to pack, had not left her more than half an hour.

"You will recollect Miss Mildred had asserted that her sister came to her bedside long after she had fallen asleep; it was evident, therefore, her visit did not take place during the interval between Martha's departure and Sarah's arrival in the sitting-room.

"In apparent contradiction to Sarah's testimony was the fact that the bridal jewels had certainly disappeared from the table in Miss Mildred's room where they were placed. But strange looks that passed from face to face in the justice-room, too plainly told that a cruel suspicion had crept over the hearers, that Miss Mildred had herself made away with this casket, in order to render her story more plausible. In truth, the circumstantial evidence against her was so strong that as I listened to it I trembled, and I saw that the two magistrates, who had seated themselves on the bench with a kindly bias in her favor, were now struck with a belief in her guilt. They would have committed her to prison on the charge of having con-

spired with a band of robbers and burglars unknown, for the abduction and concealment of her sister, had not the admiral opposed himself against their decision with all the force of his character.

"The room was cleared, that the justices might consult together; but Miss Mildred was already considered a prisoner, and a constable followed us as we bore the unhappy young lady away into another apartment. As word by word the evidence grew against her into a great pile of facts, proving the bitter hatred, the sharp jealousy and strife between the sisters, she had listened to it with the same pale, ashy face that she wore when Mr. Ralph flung off her hand from his arm; but I saw a kind of wonder mingled with deep shame and pain gather in her eyes, as, profaned by many lips, this cruel history of her love, her sufferings, her hate, was thus gradually unfolded before them.

"And now, when the prospect of a prison, with all its shame and disgrace, seemed imminent—when so many faces had bent shuddering looks of horror upon her as she passed—Mr. Ralph averting his, as though the sight of her were too dreadful a thing to bear—her courage again gave way, and she sank down upon the floor at my mistress's feet, cowering, trembling, helpless with fear and misery.

"Miss Admonitia paced the room in a fury of scorn and anger, and, rushing now to her sister's help, she would have carried her into the garden for air, but the constable stood at the tall window which opened on the terrace, and refused to let her depart. Miss Admonitia's high spirit could not brook this insult, and she peremptorily ordered the man to leave the room; at the same time she pushed open the window and strove to pass out, bearing the fainting Miss Mildred in her arms. But the constable, with coarse, hard words, laid his hand on the shrinking young lady and forcibly detained her; and as Miss Mildred stood for a moment with that brutal grasp on her little delicate arm, I saw her white lips move as if in prayer, then shriek after shriek burst from her, and, escaping from him, she rushed forward and clasped her arms wildly round Mr. Ralph, who at that moment appeared at the door. He had no time to thrust her from him before her words broke out incoherently—

"Ralph; I am innocent! Oh! believe me, or I shall die! I have not touched a hair of Alicia's head. Oh! I implore you listen to me, else how can I tell what my anguish may cause me to do or to say?"

"If it only makes you speak the truth, Miss Tremaine," said Mr. Ralph, coldly, "I shall be satisfied."

"Then you do not believe me?" she said, as she looked desolately in his face.

"I grieve to say I do not," he answered.

"As he spoke, the passionate clasp of her clinging hands unclosed, and she withdrew

from him with a look upon her white face that haunts me to this day.

"Admonitia," she said, "I am alone now—alone for the rest of my life, happen what may."

"As she uttered these words an indescribable change passed into her voice; it took nothing from its silvery sweetness, but it seemed as if something had died in it—as if the chords of hope and love had snapped, and could never speak their sweet music again in her tones. Her voice keeps this desolate ring still, and I never hear it without recalling that scene in her life.

"As she spoke Miss Admonitia turned towards Mr. Ralph with fierce indignation—

"Are you come to insult us by witnessing our degradation and misery?" she cried. "Have you not done enough, or was it you who ordered this ruffian to strike my sister?"

"Mr. Ralph's face flushed hotly.

"Leave the room," he said to the man hastily; "my presence here is sufficient."

"Perhaps he meant this kindly, but Miss Admonitia's eyes flashed fire on him.

"It wanted but this," she said, "that you should make yourself Mildred's jailer."

"Mr. Ralph did not answer her. The poor young man bewildered by grief and passion, bent over his weeping mother, and implored her in urgent whispers to leave a house in which he said, murder, hate, and treachery were lurking.

"Meanwhile, after a stormy discussion in the justice-room, the magistrates had consented to take bail for Miss Mildred's re-appearance that day fortnight. Accordingly, Sir Theobald and another gentleman were bound over in a large sum, and these heavy proceedings over, the crowd, the bustle, the noise quitted the house, and we were left alone in the quiet of despair, of grief, and sickness.

"Think of it all, Miss Esther, picture it to yourself, if you can. An old servant like me knows not where to find the burning words that might tell the fiery anguish of those bitter days. Perhaps you can fancy the deathly quiet of the house as the loud excitement died out of it, leaving pale fear and horror behind. Perhaps you can fancy the servants whispering in groups, and starting at an outspoken word; you can fancy the terror, the hush, the unnatural stillness of that household; but you can never call up before you, Miss Esther, the untold woe on the pale faces of the sisters, neither can you measure the grief of the old man by whose bedside they sat.

"My mistress did not forsake that house of grief, but she seemed perishing day by day, and I saw her face quail and her hands tremble whenever Miss Mildred approached her—signs by which I judged that Mr. Ralph had at last impressed her with his own belief.

"Day after day broke over us slowly, heavily, and, save for Sir Theobald's amendment, no ray of comfort touched Treval. A week passed by, and then the whole country side was roused by the news of an audacious burglary at a house about twenty miles off. This was followed by two or three most daring highway robberies, and every one took the alarm. Gentlemen had themselves sworn in as special constables—and among them was Mr. Ralph and Mr. Winterdale;—people stayed up all night in their houses pistol in hand, soldiers were sent for, and the whole country was in excitement. In the midst of this a man taken up on suspicion escaped from the cage where he was confined, but he left a pocket-book behind him, and in it was found a letter addressed to Miss Mildred Tremaine.

"It was a coarse scrawl, and contained only these words:—

" 'Miss—Him as you know on will meet you by the Wishin' Well, in Treval Wood, too-marrow night, at ten o'clock. Yeur sistur must know naughting, or——'

"The rest was torn off; but you can imagine to what a height of distrust the discovery of this letter raised the general feeling against Miss Mildred.

"Some of the distant gentry and magistrates took the matter up. The amount of the bail given was doubled, and orders were issued that Treval should be watched day and night. Constables were even placed in the house, and not one of the wretched servants, upon whom also suspicion fell, laid his head on his pillow at night without thinking he might be a prisoner in the morning.

"Among the keenest watchers in the woods and grounds of Treval were Mr. Ralph and Mr. Winterdale; but the man for whom they waited came not.

"At length it was resolved to show the letter to Miss Mildred, and ask her if she knew the writer. She took it in her hand and answered simply that it was certainly written by the man, whom she had met two or three times secretly in Treval Wood, on affairs of her own, and the sister to whom he alluded was the elder one, and not Alicia. She had wished to make Miss Admonitia acquainted with this man's business with her, and he had objected; hence the mention of her sister in the letter.

"Upon being pressed to divulge this person's name and abode, she had replied haughtily that she knew neither—that it was not likely any facts concerning such a man could be within her knowledge. All questions touching her reasons for meeting him she declined to answer, contenting herself by a solemn declaration that they in no way concerned her sister Alicia.

"Nevertheless, secret as Miss Mildred was in some things, she seemed recklessly defiant in others, for when, a few days later, her

banker sent to one of the magistrates to say she had drawn out a large sum just before the disappearance of her sister, she at once confessed that she had intended the money for this man to take him to America. This sum was stolen on the night of the burglary at Treval, and Miss Mildred did not in the least scruple to say that she suspected this very man to have taken it, thereby acknowledging that she believed or knew him to be one of the band in whose hands her sister's life now lay.

"After this strange occurrence whispers began to float about that Miss Alicia was certainly murdered. Mr. Ralph grew frantic as he heard this report. Long watching, fasting, and grief had almost turned his brain. He forgot all delicacy and kindness, and loudly declared his belief that the amount of bail would be willingly forfeited by Sir Theobald, and Miss Mildred would make her escape before the assizes. He avowed openly his determination to prevent this supposed escape, and for that purpose he and Mr. Winterdale, in their office of special constables, got an order from the magistrates to watch Treval. The justices found some pretence for this proceeding, but the sisters knew well why these two unhappy young men espied them in their lonely walks, and watched under their windows.

"It is this part of his conduct, Miss Esther, which your father thinks Miss Mildred can never forgive, especially as, one day in the grounds, she stopped as they passed, and said gently—

" 'Mr. Winterdale, I can forgive you—you do not know me. Mr. Treganowen, you know me—a million years of suffering on your part would not buy my pardon.'

"Your father then had no thought of asking her for pardon. Maddened by Alicia's loss, he cast himself in her path as she would have passed on, and implored her to relent towards her unhappy sister. He pleaded for her life with his, entreating that it might be spared, with bitter anguish conjuring her to break this stern silence, and tell him to what fate she had sold the wretched Alicia.

"Miss Admonitia would not let her answer this wild appeal. She pulled her away, proudly disdaining to speak to the miserable young men who had taken upon themselves so thankless an office.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"A MONTH passed on, and although placards offering large rewards had been posted all over the country, although constables had scoured the country far and near; and gentle and simple, pitying the wretched family, had joined with them hand and heart in the search for the lovely young lady missing,

neither she nor the robbers with whom she had disappeared could be traced. The sole victim on whom human justice could lay its hand was Miss Mildred. She had been unable to explain the principal facts that told against her. She had persisted in her assertion that her sister visited her room that night, at what hour, or by what means—supposing Sarah's tale true—she knew not. She had positively refused to give any reason for her secret meetings with the man suspected of belonging to the gang of robbers, and neither the fear of a prison, nor the anguish of her father and sister, nor the prayers and agony of Mr. Ralph, could shake her wonderful resolve to be silent on the matter. She was much moved when Mr. Ralph flung himself before her on Christmas Day, and implored her, for the sake of that holy time, and all its dear recollections, to take pity on him, and confess to what fate she had sold her unhappy sister.

"God knows what suffering wrung her heart as he spoke thus. She did not show it or complain of it; she only clasped her hands and gave the same cold answer, that she knew nothing of her sister's fate; but there was a more passionate tone in her voice as she solemnly asserted, as she had ever done, that her business with that strange man concerned herself alone, and in no way touched Alicia. She rebutted not, she said, that he was a scoundrel—the greater her misfortune that she was obliged to speak to him; but she had asked him no questions—his very name and place of abode were unknown to her. Then with a long, painful, pitiful gaze upon Mr. Ralph's hard, unbelieving face, she gathered up her black dress and turned away from him, crossing the lawn, and seating herself on the old gray seat at the foot of the cedar-tree. He, firmly believing in her guilt, followed her with no kind look or kind word. He spoke to her no more, but he often waylaid Miss Admonitia, imploring to know if she had relented, if a word had passed her cold lips concerning her sister, and whether there was any, even the faintest, hope of finding that unhappy lady. To such appeals Miss Admonitia always opposed a quiet scorn, passing on without a word. She believed in Miss Mildred: she believes in her still.

"Let me hasten on, Miss Esther; you will hear this tale told by a more skillful tongue than mine. My poor words have no wit to paint the picture of that time. Enough that the dark Christmas went by slowly like a dirge, the sun at the end of each short day dropping into the sea red as blood. From the towers of Treganowen my mistress and I watched it at evening with a shudder, not knowing what deed of horror the morrow might bring to light. For were there not voices among us whispering that the robbers had never seen Miss Alicia—never touched her? Miss Mildred alone had

murdered her in the dead of night, and hidden the body in some lone place known only to her. They never thought of Miss Mildred's little hands and frail, slight arms, when they said this; their malice was blind and stupid, as malice ever is.

"Mr. Ralph was not with his mother. He had no home now; the admiral had forbidden his son to enter his doors again. At every fresh outbreak of cruelty or suspicion on Mr. Ralph's part against Miss Mildred he wept; he tore his gray hair from his head by handfuls, and, holding it out before Heaven, he cursed his son in awful words. He wished that he who rejected the love of the noblest girl on earth, calling her 'liar' and 'traitress,' might have a liar and traitress for his wife, and ally himself with the villany and murder which he now laid upon the head of the innocent.

"My mistress shuddered and wept to hear him: In her heart of hearts I distrusted her of hiding a fear, a shrinking thought, of Miss Mildred's guilt, and therefore excusing her son; but the admiral, who had no such thought, could not forgive him.

"The new year came in with stormy gusts of rain and tempests of wind, and sharp frosts followed by sudden dreary thaws, in which wintry time, cowering in gloom and fear, we began to count the days to the assizes when Miss Mildred would be brought up to answer her bail, and set before the judge for trial. But on the 22d of January the servants at Treval, opening the door of the north porch, stumbled in the dark morning over a rude coffin or chest. Silent, breathless, with hearts beating, they wrenched the lid, and there lay before them the body of Miss Alicia Tremaine. Servant after servant gathered around and gazed in horror on her pale face before they found courage to summon her wretched father and sisters. Then, amid heavy tears and sobs, and cries of anguish, they lifted the poor corpse out of that rude resting-place, and carried it to the room where it had lain in life and joy. Then they saw she had been stabbed to the heart after a heavy blow on the forehead, which happily must have deprived the poor sufferer of sense, but which had greatly disfigured her once beautiful face. Save for the profusion of bright brown hair, the dark brows, the long lashes, the little hands, and the clothes she wore, few would have recognized in this pale, ghastly figure the lovely Alicia Tremaine. Beneath the head of the corpse lay the missing casket of pearls prepared for the bridal of Miss Mildred.

"When Sir Theobald first looked upon the features of his dead child, he gave one helpless cry and sank senseless into the arms of his servant; hence all things fell into the

hands of his two daughters, and wonderfully well they ordered them.

"Until the officers of justice came nothing was touched, and it was in their presence that Miss Alicia's body was carried to her room, and the casket was discovered and examined. The strange letter found in the lining, which you have read, Miss Esther, went greatly to prove that Miss Mildred was innocent. Coroner and jury were brought hastily together, an inquest was held, and a verdict returned of murder against some person or persons unknown.

"In spite of the letter, which was proved to be in the writing of Miss Alicia, the magistrates were still divided in opinion as to Miss Mildred's implication in a crime which had rid her of her sister, when a highwayman, shot by a gentleman in self-defence, in dying made and signed a confession, in the presence of a justice of the peace, to the effect that Miss Mildred was entirely innocent of the abduction of her sister. He declared himself to be the man whom she had met by the wishing-well in the wood, but, by every solemn word a dying man could use, he asserted that her motive for seeing him was good, and true, and pure, and in no way did it regard Miss Alicia. When questioned if it concerned Mr. Ralph, he broke out with an oath, saying he had promised to keep the business secret; and though he had never yet kept his word to living man or woman, he would keep it now to Miss Mildred. On this point he was obstinate—on all others he answered freely.

"He confessed to being one of the gang who entered Treval on the night of the 15th November, but he added the incredible assertion that Miss Alicia herself admitted them, and accompanied them willingly on their departure. He hinted that she had done this for the sake of some one she loved, but he would divulge no more on this point, refusing to give the person's name or any details concerning him, on the plea that the information might injure his comrades, and he scorned, he said, to die a traitor to his friends. He expressed great horror on hearing of Miss Alicia's murder, declaring himself entirely ignorant of the fact, and avowing that he had seen her but a short time since, alive and well.

"This extraordinary confession, made at the moment of death, when the man had nothing to hope or to fear from this world, coupled with the letter found in the casket, and various other circumstances too minute and numerous to tell of now, proved plainly Miss Mildred's innocence. She was released from the terrible position in which Mr. Ralph's unjust suspicions had been the original means of placing her, but she has never held up her head since. She has always lived as though some horrible doom were hanging over her by a single hair.

"Apparently the death of their accomplice, and the dread of what he might have confessed, frightened the gang of miscreants out of the country, and we heard of no more robberies, but we heard likewise no tidings of the culprits. All search seemed fruitless. Doubtless they have perished miserably, as all such men perish, but, if so, not one of them in dying has cleared up the mystery of this their worst crime.

"Miss Alicia was buried in the old church at Trevella, where a single line on a slab of white marble records merely her age and the simple word 'Alicia' without surname. Some say that the mere suspicion of her having disgraced the name of Tremaine was sufficient to hinder the proud family from placing it on her tombstone; others aver that Miss Alicia was married, and the blank space left on the marble will be filled in one day. At all events, the robber's confession has left a blot on her fair fame, and I have seen a blush burn hot on Miss Admonitia's proud face when this sad point in her sister's strange fate has been touched on.

"A great crowd stood in and around the church on the day of the funeral; but among the multitude it seemed to me that I saw only the faces of those upon whom all gazers' eyes were turned—the pale faces of the two sisters who stood on each side of their father.

"Miss Admonitia, with her veil down, stepped proudly on, disdaining to look at friend or foe; but Miss Mildred, with her veil up, and her fair cheeks of a terrible whiteness, turned her eyes, all tearful, from side to side, with an air of distraction and grief very pitiful to see.

"Was she seeking for sympathy?—was she looking for the pity she was never to gain?

"The people knew that she was innocent, or rather that the shadow of guilt which had rested on her was cleared away; yet they shrank from her, and muttered as she passed. Still she kept up bravely, only looking distractedly from side to side, as I have said, till her eyes met the face of Mr. Ralph Treganowen; then she visibly shivered, and the great tears, held in, with such a touching sad strength till now, fell one by one down her white cheeks. At last, as the earth fell upon the coffin, and he who should have been *her* lover with a great cry of grief hid his face within his hands, she clutched her father's arm and fell forward almost into the vault. Miss Admonitia, with a quiet, firm hand caught her, and Miss Mildred heard no more of the solemn words that consigned her sister to the dust. She was carried from the church and laid down insensible upon a grave, Mr. Winterdale standing over her with a stern, watchful face.

"Mr. Ralph wrung his mother's hand at the church door, and departed. He never saw his mother's or his father's face again.

He joined the army abroad, and when he returned my master and mistress were both at rest.

"The admiral was a broken man both in health and mind. Only in one thing was he strong and unchanged—that was in his belief in Miss Mildred, and in his love for her. Many a time, as he walked up and down—a dying man—on the sunny south terrace, I have seen him strike his stick into the ground, and murmur—

"A noble girl!—by heavens, a noble girl!"

"Then he would mutter—

"Ralph—Alicia—God help them both!"

"He wandered much in his mind before he died, raving of a brother's curse, and calling out to his wife to take down the lie that stood in the church.

"My mistress allowed no one to wait on him but Miss Mildred, herself, and me. She stood by him night and day. She prayed unceasingly for him, with his thin hand clasped within her own. The long estrangement of so many bitter years seemed forgotten now; death's coming shadow chased all other shadows from their hearts.

"Sometimes he bade his wife and Miss Mildred not to pray for him, because it was hopeless; at other times, in a voice of agony, he implored them to kneel and cry to God for him loudly.

"So the scene shifted with him till the last came. His worst mood was when he jested fiercely.

"I only meant to give him a lesson," he cried; "a practical lesson. I meant a grim joke—that was all. Ha! ha!"

"Then he would laugh, and afterwards weep; and in an old man it was a sad sight to see.

"One day, when he was calm, he took Miss Mildred's hand, and looking her in the face, suddenly kissed her.

"A martyr!" he murmured; "but God sees it."

"Hush!" said Miss Mildred softly, as she looked round on me; but he persisted—

"A martyr, because you have loved me and mine. You see, Mildred, it is true; Treganowen Towers have passed away from me in blood—in blood—blood!"

"Here he raised his voice, and the room rang with the terrible word. Miss Mildred soothed him with her tears and caresses, and signed to me to leave the room. As I stood at the door without I heard that wondrous calm, clear voice of hers, like a golden ripple, assuaging his agony in the sweetest music of prayer, drawing down the angels of pardon and peace to speak comfortably to him, as he passed through the valley of the shadow of death.

"He died the next day, calling out in his last thirst for wine; but as I put the glass to his mouth he thrust it away, crying out

that it was blood; and with this word on his lips his soul departed.

"Twelve months of widowhood, and then the gentle spirit of my mistress went to God. In tending her, as in tending the admiral, Miss Mildred was still the ministering angel of the house, but we servants did not like her. We hated to meet her in the dark passages alone; she seemed to bring a chill and a shiver with her as she passed. Often the sight of her white, uncomplaining face seemed to turn my very blood cold, as it glanced by all icy and shining. As I saw her creeping about in her silent way, so soft of step, so silvery of voice, she seemed to me not like any thing real, but like a spirit in a woman's garb. The rustle of a robe, or a sweet echo, like the music that rises at night from the graves of the just, that was all one heard when she passed—nothing more.

"She seemed mistress here when the admiral and his wife were both gone, but all changes that took place by her orders were made so quietly that people scarce noted them. Still there were whispers about that the Towers were hers; but when Mr. Ralph came home unexpectedly at the end of three years, she bade us consider him as master, and she contradicted these reports in a calm, determined way that silenced people.

"Mr. Ralph came home, as the old saying goes, 'a sadder and a wiser man;' he was also handsomer and more manly. It caused at first some scandal that Sir Theobald received him kindly at Treval, but the old man could not forget that, if he had persecuted and betrayed his second child, it was for love of the youngest, the jewel of his house.

"Judge of our surprise when we heard that not only was this love faded and clean gone, and all the past forgotten, but Mr. Ralph was suing to Miss Mildred for forgiveness, and entreating her to be his wife.

"At first there was some talk of her consenting; then suddenly she refused with an intensity of purpose wonderful in a woman only then three-and-twenty. Again Mr. Ralph left the country, and never returned till last winter, when you, Miss Esther, flung that paper at his feet from the roof of Treval.

"Many tales linger still about the country concerning Miss Alicia. They say she haunts the house, and sometimes at night is seen on the roof more like a creeping shadow or crouching animal than a woman; and there in the moonlight she flits to and fro painfully, searching blindly for her murderer, for until his crime is brought to light, people say there will be no rest for her pale ghost.

"Miss Esther, my tale is ended. You need not look at me so wistfully; I have held back nothing that I know."

Here ends the narrative of Prudence White. On reading it over to her a week or two after I had written it down, she said I had used grander words than hers, especially in the latter part. Perhaps she is right; my pen is too young and unskilful to retain the simple language, the kind old homely words, in which she told the story, ever keeping her own unselfish gentleness, her true service, her faithful love in the background.

Nevertheless, like glinting sunshine, these virtues cross the dark web of this history, bringing a bright thread here and there among its shadows and crime; though, perchance, my hand, unequal to the task, has, in guiding the shuttle, failed to show them in their truest beauty, or place them in their fullest light.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

PRUDENCE was right when she said I looked at her wistfully. I was thinking of my mother, who had come into my life like a dream, and seemed now like a dream departed.

"Prudence," said I, faintly, "you have told me nothing about mamma."

"I would rather not, Miss Esther; she suited your papa, and that's enough. He was not bound to marry to please an old servant, though she may love him like a mother."

Thinking of the man Paul and my mother's declaration, the horror of which had been the last blow that struck me into fever, I thought it best not to press Prudence with questions on a point that might lead to dangerous topics. Pondering thus, I abruptly changed the subject.

"Who is it says the ghost of Alicia Tremaine haunts Treval?" I asked, and a sudden throb of my heart, a slight paleness of cheek, accompanied my question.

"Many and many say she does," answered Prudence; "but then they say too that the admiral walks through the Towers of Treganowen; and there are others who declare they've seen the unfortunate lieutenant dashing himself from the window, as if he was bent on killing his own ghost, so I never heed such tales, Miss Esther. I can only tell you I never saw my poor master, or any other ghost either here or at Treval."

"But suppose I had, Prudence, what would you say then?"

"I should say you were light-headed, Miss Esther, or had mistook your shadow for a spirit."

"Prudence, I declare to you I saw at Treval a crouching, groping figure such as you describe, and I was not light-headed, and I had no shadow, for I was nearly in darkness.

I was on the roof, not on the outside, but beneath the leads."

"Do you feel well to-night, Miss Esther?" interrupted Prudence, regarding me with a scrutinizing look. "This is just the way you went on when you had the fever. We won't talk any more; you had better go to bed, miss."

I found by my father's manner the next day that Prudence White had repeated to him my imprudent speech. He took me out for a ride and after a long gallop on the moor he directed our way steadily to the sea.

A glorious sun, set in a sky of deepest sapphire, shone down on us, filling every vein with rejoicing; the ever-flowering gorse, faint with its load of perfume, the bruised thyme, the wild mint and chamomile yielded their fragrance beneath the ringing feet of our horses; the air was clear, and fresh, and pure beyond a citizen's dream, and from every peeping cottage garden, hidden between huge rocks, or resting against some giant mass of granite, there came wafted to our lips the scent of may and lilac, of lily, stock, and roses. I breathed this perfumed atmosphere with intense delight. I felt the beauty of earth and sky filling my whole being, feeding me with a spiritual bread that satisfied the hunger and thirst of my soul, while every thought ran freer, and the rich, happy blood of youth dyed my cheeks with brightest rose.

At a sudden turn, where the bridle-road edged the cliff with a sharp danger, my father drew rein and stopped.

"Esther," he said, "such a sight as this should surely chase away all sickly fancies."

Nothing could be more beautiful than the scene before us. Such a vision might have haunted Tasso in his dungeon, bringing joy to his wrung heart, spite of the sharp pang felt as its beauty faded away, and the prison wall loomed out in cruel reality through his dream.

I stood entranced, so bathed in the charm, so steeped in the fulness of sight, that my being seemed suddenly large enough to hold a very heaven of happiness, and a sea, not of thought, but of *life*, rushed over me wave after wave, unutterable for joy, unspeakable in words.

Before us lay the ocean, sublimely blue, calm, deep, mystic; filled with voices like the rush of angel-wings travelling in their strength, scattering from their pinions whippers of doom—voices whose words are sealed up, not to be interpreted by human tongue, and yet speaking to the soul in a language so dear, that the heart leaps up at the sound, and tears of tenderness spring to the eyes, as the first dash of the ocean spray touches our charmed ears.

What Englishman lives, so untrue to his island, that his heart does not bound at sight

of the blue waves, with their curled locks of foam, dashing forward to meet his feet, and beating out a welcome to him in glorious music, as they rush over the golden sands? Then, if the stout Anglo-Saxon loves the sea, what is it to the warm, impulsive Cornish Celt, whose narrow granite ridge of land runs out like a tongue to lap the waves, and wind-beaten, rock-bound, and seagirt, stands in the midst of the waters smiling in verdure and joy?

Truly to him the sea is a thing of life, his nursing-mother, his playmate, his friend; he lays his hand upon the crest of the waves as the English rider on his horse's mane, and caresses the deep waters, loving them equally whether basking calmly in the summer sky, or lashed to fury by the arms of the northwest wind.

With this mystic love glowing warmly at my heart I looked down upon the scene below. A long slope of matted heath and sea herbage, soft, elastic, and deeply green, had conducted us to the verge of the cliff. There was no beach lying at the foot of this dizzy precipice; like a giant wall, black, perpendicular, terrible, it raised itself against the waves, which laved its base at all times of the tide. Here the huge rocks, polished by the lapping waters, displayed their flashing colors to the sun, and gave back to the transparent depths the purple and rose tints, the changing green and black of their veined masses.

But words fail me when I would tell the colors of the serpentine, and the sea on this lovely coast. The dark green of the rocks veined with scarlet throws a rose flush over the water, which, mingling with its vivid green and deep blue shadows, blends all into one glorious, inexpressible hue, changing, flashing, sparkling from beauty to beauty with every varying light. Clear, clear as purest crystal, are these deep, rolling waves, so that bright pebbles, and vivid rocks of serpentine, and dark sea-weeds reposing in their stilly depths shine out in calm distinctness far beneath the eye, their glancing lights and massy shadows, so pure in this transparent water, adding an elfin and mysterious charm to the rosy sea. One might deem the abodes of the sea nymphs and the jewelled caves of mermaids are lying there bared to the curious eye, the flashing serpentine, gemmed and streaked with ardent colors, seeming a fitting palace for their habitation.

In gazing down the dizzy precipice, with curious eye long searching, I could trace, where the spray lapped the rock in a long shining roll, the streaks of red like creeping veins of blood meandering through the blackness, and the radiant tints of green, and orange, and crimson that shine out in the polished serpentine; but from above the cliff these bright colors scarcely tinge the funereal black of that sombre wall which,

near the cavern of Pigeon Hugo, raises itself against the sweeping roll of the Atlantic, surging in with a ceaseless moan, like the wail of a boundless sorrow crying to the earth.

At Dollah Hugo<sup>1</sup> the lovely colors of rock and sea are more plainly visible, but enough of beauty was here to keep me silent as I gazed out upon the loveliness of sea and land, clad in their bright garment of sunshine, fanned by the western wind, whose whisper is the scent of flowers, and lulled by the music of the waves kissing the seagirt rock.

In the same silence of this intense joy—which is almost pain in its depth—we turned away, and rode on for a mile before uttering a word. Before such scenes the tongue is tied and powerless; it is the soul that speaks, and this has no human words for its interpreter. In the presence of immortal beauty it recognizes its kinship with the eternal, a brotherhood with all truth and loveliness; it feels an aspiration towards joy like the stir of living wings, and with this mingles the pain of loss, the mystery of a heaven forgotten, forfeited, and a pining, a longing that quenches hope in tears.

Past Pradanack Head and Mullion Island we rode on, and still I had made no answer to my father's remark respecting sickly fancies. And I was not sorry, because it was a scene in keeping with my thoughts, when he stopped at a little church standing on high ground, and therefore a conspicuous object even from the bay.

"We have reached Mullion Church, Esther, and there is a tomb here I want you to see. Let me help you to alight."

We fastened our horses by the old Cornish stile, and entered the church. In the chancel my father stopped, and showed me this epitaph:

"THOS. FLAVEL, Vicar of Mullion.

"Died 1682.

"Earth, take thine earth, my sin let Satan have,  
The world my goods, my soul my God who gave;  
For from these four—Earth, Satan, World, and God—  
My flesh, my sin, my goods, my soul I had."

"What a pity this good man is not living now, Esther!" said my father, with a glance at me.

"Why?" I asked, surprised at the tone in which he spoke.

"Because he was the celebrated ghost-layer of the West. Not a haunted house in Cornwall which he did not visit and free from its troubled guest; not a single spectre-haunted man or woman for whom he did not pray, and on whom he did not lay the calm holy hands which drove the evil spirit away. Now are you sorry that he is dead, Esther?"

<sup>1</sup> The Dean of Canterbury, in a late paper in *Good Words*, prefers the cave of Dollah Hugo to the famed *grotta azzura* at Capri. He also says that the Cornish sea has very little to fear in comparison to the Mediterranean at Amalfi and Capri.



As my father uttered these words I saw that our long ride through the loveliest scenes of the West, and this visit to the grave of the ghost-layer were preconceived things.

"Prudence has told you," I said, softly. "But I do not think the good Thomas Flavel, or any other exorciser, could lay *my* ghost to rest. I saw it, and I was greatly afraid; but what is most strange is that I long to see it again, and I feel I should not be afraid."

"Esther," said my father with sorrowful seriousness, "you are mistaken, you saw nothing; you were even then ill, and had strange images in your brain. Remember, that three days afterwards you were struck with fever, and it grieves me to see you retain in health the delusions of sickness. I brought you to this tomb that you might recognize the folly and superstition of an age that induced this good man to believe himself a ghost layer. We know now this was an illusion of his, but think how his faith in ghosts must have strengthened the terrors of his neighbors, and how many spectres his very presence in a village must have invoked. All illusions are mischievous; throw off yours, Esther, unless you would grieve me."

"One question," said I, a little tremblingly, "and then I will answer you. Was I *mad* during my illness?"

My father paused, much troubled.

"Esther," he said, taking my hand, "both Dr. Spencer and I foresaw this question of yours, and he advised me to answer it candidly. Still you have asked a harder thing than you suppose, because I cannot reply by either 'yes' or 'no.' During the height of fever you were delirious, but on your recovery, or apparent recovery, you were certainly in possession of all your faculties, memory alone excepted. All your past life was swept away from you, and you recollected only the occurrences that had chanced since your illness; just as since your real recovery you have forgotten all that happened during sickness, and your old life has returned to you, leaving that time a blank. Yet how can we call this blank madness when it showed no loss of sense? On the contrary, faculties were developed in you during this period which either you do not possess at all, or which else lie now strangely dormant. Your personality seemed changed in some mysterious way; all this dreamy listless indolence which is your characteristic was changed for an intense vitality and power; accomplishments—not yours, alas! now—darted then easily from your lips and fingers. Dr. Spencer begged me to induce your mind to inquire into its state during this period. Can you remember nothing of all this?"

<sup>1</sup> Similar cases are mentioned by Dr. Abercrombie in his work on intellectual powers.

"Nothing," said I, with a weariness which was but a longing for the old power.

My father looked at me sorrowfully.

"I believe you," he said, "strange as it appears; and all the gifts which enchanted us have left you now your true health is returned, and nothing remains save this one sad delusion of ghosts. I wish this would quit you, Esther, and some of your pretty accomplishments come back in its place. One would think you had two individualities, and that during your illness you showed us your real self—a playful, laughing, singing Esther—which you keep hidden away, and never allow to peep forth now."

My father's tone was a jesting one, but the expression of his eyes as he gazed at me was earnest and inquiring. Beneath his look my nerves thrilled painfully, and thoughts came crowding into my brain heavy with the old fancies I had had at Treval, of a strange duality within me. I tried to shake them off.

"How could I have laughed and sung," I said, "when I was so ill? I remember how weak I was when I woke up at Treganowen."

"For a long time you were quite well and strong at Treval," said my father; "but then you had a return of fever, and it was during this we brought you home, as we saw symptoms of the old, quiet, sad Esther coming back in her normal state of ghost-seeing and dreaminess. Now shall I apostrophize the spirit of the old ghost-layer here, and entreat him to exorcise your spectre, and bring you in its stead the laughter and song that enchanted us?"

My father stretched out his arm playfully towards the quaint epitaph of Thos. Flavel as he spoke, but I laid my hand on his and stopped him.

"Papa," I said, and I felt my voice falter, "you say the shape the new, the strange Esther took at Treval during this illness, this blank of mine, 'enchanted *us*.' Whom do you mean by 'us'? Was mamma pleased? did she like me then?"

My father turned from the tomb of the ghost-layer, and hid his face from me as he answered—

"Even your mother, my dear, cherished you a little then."

"And—and was there any one else?" I asked in a whisper that thrilled through the old chancel like the moan of a spirit in pain.

My father faced me suddenly with a keen searching glance.

"Do you really remember nothing, Esther?" he said.

"Nothing, nothing," I answered in a hopeless tone. I said this, and it was true, and yet not true, for deep down in my heart I felt a strange consciousness of some great love that had wrapped me about in an infinite tenderness, some love I had lost now, and was searching for blindly and in vain.

"Then if you remember nothing, Esther,"

said my father kindly, "do you not see that if there were others you would not know them—would not recognize even their names?"

"Miss Mildred will not let you tell," said I, with some slight passion in my voice.

My father turned deadly pale, and with hasty, echoing tread strode down the chancel without a word. In the porch he waited for me, and lifted me on my horse.

"Never say that again, Esther," he said, quietly, as he placed the bridle in my hand.

I did not answer, for my heart was full, and my brain felt irritated and oppressed as thought groped dimly through it, seeking a light wherewith to examine this importunate sense of being loved and lost which beat at the portal of my closed memory. In passing through the churchyard a gravestone met my eye, on which I read the words—

"STEPHEN BEDILLA.

Aged 55 years."

The dead man was nothing to me, and the date of his death was long ago, before I was born, yet I repeated his name to myself like one in a dream, saying many times, "Stephen, Stephen."

"Papa, what does the word Stephen mean?"

I pointed with my riding-whip to the stone, which stood almost in our path.

"It means a garland or crown," said my father, riding on abruptly before me.

I thought of the wreath of dead leaves which I had superstitiously locked away, and my lips echoed the words, "A garland—my garland." Then with a sudden vivid blush I sank into a silent reverie. Whose love was this—for love it surely was—that had awoke me from this dead sleep of my chilled existence to a happy life, bringing gifts to my indolent and fitful nature which my dulled mind could not recal now? Was it his? My young heart fluttered at the thought, and the ring of my horse's feet danced in my ears to the words, "Stephen, a garland, a crown of joy."

Alas! when that wreath touched my temples I found it a crown of thorns, twined with sharp suffering and bitter sorrow.

## CHAPTER XXV.

I was a dull companion to my father that day in our long ride home. In vain he called to me cheerfully to look at the great peak of rocks lying piled up in fantastic pinacles and towers, and hence called the cathedral.<sup>1</sup> I looked, but I scarcely saw; neither could I be charmed by the glistening bay of Polurrian, or by ancient Gunwalloe, with its hoar church, stricken by time, and

detached belfry, lonely by the seashore, ringing out its bells to the wild sea.

I was glad when the weary miles brought us into the granite country again, for I loved its barrenness better than the fertile serpentine, though the lovely white heath,<sup>2</sup> which grows only on this stratum, lingered tenderly in my hand as its best remembrance.

As we neared the gates of Treganowen I grew nervous, greatly longing to speak before their gloomy portals swallowed me up. Instinctively I knew my father yearned for a word from me to assure him that these lovely views of heathy earth and open sky had cleared my morbid fancies, and the tomb of the ghost-layer had shamed my superstition; but I could say neither.

"Papa," I cried, forcing my tone to be gay, "you should have dipped me in the well of St. Outhbert<sup>3</sup> when I was an infant, to preserve me from the machinations of the Evil One. Nothing else, I fear, would save me from being haunted."

"There are many other wells, Esther," said my father; "suppose you try the well of knowledge! You were too wild, too free at Treval. I must begin your education now in earnest, and undo this mischief if I can. I have sent to London for some books purposely for you."

"I wish Prudence had not told you," I answered wearily, "for I feel sure books will not take from me my memory of what is a fact, and not a fancy."

"Prudence's avowal," observed my father, "only gave me the sorrowful assurance that one illusion of fever remains fixed in your mind, for the fact itself—as you erroneously call it—I heard you constantly refer to during your illness, both here and at Clifton."

"And at Treval," I asked eagerly, "where I got so much stronger and better, and where you said I had no delirium—did I speak of it there?"

"Never once," answered my father, emphatically; "at least not to me and Admonitia, and your attendants assure me you never spoke of it to them; the illusion seemed quite vanished. I never saw your mind in a more healthy state; you never talked of this ghost-woman then, Esther, and of course we did not broach the subject: we avoided raising the idea of her again in your brain; and to show your fearlessness, you visited the roof often, both with me and alone. During all your convalescence, until your second attack, I only remarked one eccentricity—you always climbed the great cedar on the lawn every evening to see the sun set."

A sudden pallor overspread my face at his

<sup>1</sup> The Erica vagans, known by the name of the Cornish heath.

<sup>2</sup> The holy well here named lies in a cavern by the sea between Penhale Point and Kelsey Head; it is approached by a beach of silvery sand.

<sup>3</sup> Near Mullion Cove.

words, and quivering before my eyes the shadow of the blank wall passed in all its ghastly woe.

"It is a pity," said I, glancing with a trembling look at my father, "that my strange relapse should have taken from me all recollection of my stay at Treval."

"It is a pity indeed," he answered, in a tone of such deep sorrow that I was startled. "Heaven alone knows what pain might be spared you and me, my child, if on restoration to health you had awoke with a full consciousness of that period; but the time is lost to you, and with it—" Here he stopped abruptly, and then by an evident effort continued: "I mean in that case I should not now have the pain of combating your singular illusion of having met the spirit-figure of a woman on the roof at Treval."

I sighed deeply, but I refrained from answering. I felt this one memory would ever appear in opposite forms to my father and myself—to him as a spectre of my brain, a phantom raised by disease; to me a tangible shape, which I regarded by some mysterious means in two lights—that is, in singular feeling, this pale sheen of memory, was so subtle, so lightly poised upon my brain, that it eluded my grasp; if by cunning steps of thought I approached it, the full light of memory with all the attendant horrors that accompanied my creeping journey over the roof, and in a pale glimmer, too faint for memory, too impalpable to be seized by thought, in which I faced the shape, and regarded it without fear or vestige of horror. Then I found it gone, flown like a swift, or if by force of will I touched it, lo! it died instantly like a gossamer midge in a rough boy's hand. Seeing, then, the impossibility of clothing in words this shadowy, ever-fleeting light, in which the spirit-woman came to me in curious familiar shape, and shrinking from her other form of ghastly horror, I resolved to be silent, and abruptly changed the subject.

"Papa," I said, laying my hand a moment on his arm, "you are not angry at the tale Prudence told me?"

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Abercrombie, in his work on the intellectual powers, enumerates, in cases where the brain has been affected, many instances of a total loss of the impression of time with all its attendant circumstances. Speaking of that mysterious disease, somnolency, he mentions a case where a young lady on recovering from her first attack was found to have lost every kind of acquired knowledge, and her education had to be recommenced; but on a second attack, with subsequent recovery, she was restored to all the knowledge she possessed before her malady, but she had not the least recollection of any thing that had occurred, or any information or accomplishment acquired, during the interval of health between the two attacks—this time, with all its thoughts, its acts, its daily drama of life, was entirely lost to her. I quote this case as one equivalent to Esther's.

There was an instant and painful emotion visible on my father's face, and he steadied his lips with an effort as he spoke.

"No, my dear. I wished her to say something to you, that, erroneous and unformed as her tale may be, it might yet prepare you for the history I have promised one day to tell you."

My father's hand was on the gate opening to the avenue; I laid mine on his bridle.

"One word more," I said, hurriedly. "I cannot speak in-doors—it kills me. Is mamma coming back, or does she hate me too much to live where I am?"

I did not expect to see such anguish quiver on his face as stood there when he turned it towards me.

"Esther," he said, "your mother will not come back to Treganowen, but I shall go sometimes to see her, and will take you with me whenever you like. I cannot believe she hates you; you do not know her, and you judge wrongly. But never question me about your mother; remember she is also my wife, and perhaps, when you are only seeking to relieve your own pain, you may be cruelly adding to mine. Let us go in—the sun is sinking."

"One thing more, papa; only one, I entreat you. Who is Paul, and what has my mother got to do with him?"

My father looked at me with unfeigned astonishment.

"Paul! what Paul?" he said. Then he put his hand tenderly on my shoulder, as though some sorrowful thought concerning me had struck him.

"My poor Esther," he said, "fling away these delusions of your illness. Neither your mother nor I ever heard of any one called Paul, nor did you, except in your dreams of fever."

I passed through the gate silently, which he held open for me. I remember I had in my haste half broken the promise made to my mother, and his answer came to me like a relief.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

THE books of which my father had spoken arrived. I was a hungry reader, and had they been the veriest garbage of the sentimental school, then at the height of its power, I should still have devoured them. The avidity, then, with which I flung myself on this mental food, on finding it exactly suited to my peculiar idiosyncrasy, can be well imagined. With a beating heart, with flushed cheeks and hot hands, I turned over the pages, devouring the words that told how illness dims the brain, and how before the wearied sight spectres rose and vanished, voices muttered in the vexed ear, and visions came and departed. Still, throughout the whole range of facts placed

methodically before my understanding, I observed the patients themselves, if sane, were rarely deceived; their illusion appeared to them an illusion, and they grappled with and conquered it, or else indifferently watched the fleeting apparitions, half-amused by their fantastic wonders. In no instance was there any analogy to my own case. I read here no history of children lonely and spell-bound, who watched through long months for one woful shadow coming and going in dreary monotony against a blank wall. The shadows here were traced back to some indistinct memory, or forgotten tale, or half-remembered dream, or other causes named as ghost-raising; but to none of these could I ascribe that spectre face, and the groping and terrible figure on the roof with which I had so suddenly identified it. The result was that my belief in the *reality* of what I had seen became strengthened, and a determination grew out of my studies which I will name at the right time and in the right place.

None the less did my interest in reading continue, and, above all, I dwelt with throbbing emotion on those narratives which spoke of preternatural hates and loves arising from disease. A bone more or less depressed, a pressure like a feather's weight upon the brain, and lo! we were loving and gentle, or hateful and furious. Wandering in a maze of thought, I began to see dimly how blind all human judgment was, and, pondering on my mother's hatred for me, and mine for Miss Mildred, pity grew up in my heart for both, as faith with calm hand led me through that labyrinth of mystery which surrounds our double being of mind and matter. Yearning towards the light, led by this new-born pity, a straggling beam of God's infinite love and mercy reached me, and as one spark from the divine rays brightened my darkness, I bowed my head upon my hands, weeping and prayerful. From that day forward the shrinking antipathy I bore to Miss Mildred changed its character, and the sullen resentment against my mother which burned slowly at my heart died away in remorse and compassion.

Thus far my reading did me good, but no further. My dangerous imagination was inflamed with excitement, and my nerves were thrilled with an unhealthy quiver, as I read of trances in which the spirit seemed to leave the body for a while, returning from distant worlds heavy with unlawful knowledge which the faltering tongue could never impart. In vain for me the cold fingers of science uncovered the mystery, and held the delusion up to the light bared of its mystic folds, discovering its true shape to be disease or madness. The unspiritual explanation given in calm, chilly words made no impression on a mind like mine. For me the mysterious veil rested still upon these strange facts, and I believed and trembled.

Again I read of men and women with sane eyes beholding visions which they wrestled with bravely, knowing them to be the creations of an ill-conditioned physical state. Here was the story of a lady looking from her window watching a coach driving up to her door, and as it draws nearer the shrinking watcher sees within a crowd of ghastly skeletons. It stops, and one by one these grisly visitors descend and lay a bony hand upon the bell, but there is no sound when they ring, no servant obeys the ghostly summons. Silently the fleshy things glide away, and the sick lady watching knows her dread disease has laid that day a ghastlier hand upon her brain, and her fight now is for reason as well as life. Nobly she bears the battle; and when at evening, as she sits before a mirror, the face of her dead sister looks over her shoulder and meets her in the glass, she does not shrink; she recognizes the phantom of an unsound mind, and, unflinching, gives it back look for look, till healthy thought, conquering the sick imagination, banishes the hideous shadow. I read, I mused, but was not yet convinced. There is a reality in some sights which the arguments of science cannot explain away. My pile of books, with all their learning, could not shako down that pale figure on the roof from its place in my memory, or change one flutter of its garment into the "baseless fabric of a vision."

I set aside these works to study a little book that spoke of strange gifts bestowed in sleep and snatched away on waking. In this quickening slumber the faculties were unchained, and revelled, joyous, in unknown powers. Numbed, perchance, by want and ignorance was the waking brain, but wrapped in sleep, the soul broke loose from chance and time, and all the chains of circumstances, to clench with free and happy clasp its gifts divine of poesy and song. Then, flying with glad wings from gift to gift, thought became will, and instant with the will sprang forth the deed, the voice broke into melody perfect and pure—for when thought, and will, and power are perfect, the creations born of these must be perfect too—the hand obeyed the spirit, and glanced over the keys with fingers music's own; the stammering tongue, unskilled in speech, and rude with rustic thought, lurst from its trammels, and revelled, glorious, over a field of language golden with image of heaven, silver with the sheen of earth; and all the innate, inborn, and struggling genius, stifled long in sleep and clay, sprang with a glad leap into life and into action. The power to create, to do, is the test of genius; by their works shall we know them who wear its unseen crown.

As I hung breathless over these histories

<sup>1</sup> Related by Sir David Brewster in his work on *Natural Magic*.

of a fettered power set free, my heart beat painfully, and a sick longing like the faintness of death seized my spirit. I too had this stir within me as of unknown wings—I too felt that I was not living my *whole* life—that something was concealed, hid away from me by unseen hands, and I wept for very bitterness, and beat the darkness blindly as I thought to escape from the mysterious shackles that held my soul closely enchained.

Alas! I was like a prisoner striking useless blows on the walls of his dungeon, to whose senses only returns the dreary echo of his own vain efforts to be free.

In sleep, then, these sadder prisoners of fate and circumstance have been set free, and the rapt ears of listeners have hung as in a charm on eloquence poured forth in silvery floods, or raging with all the might and liberty of battle.

And, O heavens! when this rich sleep was over, and the poor crushed brain held down by ignorance, and coarser toil came back with heavy fall to its dead, dull day, learned doctors come together called this awakening.

Sickness, was it? Yes; then let it be sickness, if they would; but it was a sickness that had a score of sound healths in it, and a life running through its veins that surely sprang from some brighter world than this.

"And here is Miss Admonitia," said I wearily, "driving up the avenue in her old landau, with her old ideas that, because I am a child in years, she who has helped to make me a weird old woman must treat me like a child still. I will not question her; she will tell me nothing, and I shall grope on blindly among these mysteries till I die or go mad; or, worse still, she will give me a half-confidence, a new secret to keep, and will not see that I am weary, weary, weary."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

LISTLESSLY I put away my book, and with languid footfall descended the great staircase, one part of my thoughts childishly counting the steps, or wondering if the painted eyes of shepherdess and warrior portraits had not now and then some evil spirit looking out of them, while the other part of my thoughts soared away into yearnings unutterable for pain and longing, where sharp thorns pierced my feet as I travelled on, and my outstretched hands, seeking passionately, beat the wall, and a voiceless cry upon my lips for peace died away in darkness.

Unconsciously my feet brought me to Miss Admonitia's side, and my small hand lay languidly in hers, ere I awoke and looked upon her face. Then I started, for

she was changed—changed, I mean, from that time before the blank when I was afraid of her, and her brow had always worn a frown. Now she was paler, sadder, thinner, but there was a something shining in her eyes for me never there before—a something I could only call *love*, and wonder at with a sort of sick fear. Yes, fear, because the love was for that unknown Esther, for whom even now I was blindly seeking—that Esther of the blank time, nursed at Treval during the bleak winter days, warmer to me than summer sunshine.

And for me, the gray, pale Estler, standing by her side, the love died out of her eyes in a cloud of chill disappointment as she relinquished my hand and said coldly—

"Well, Esther, child, how are you?"

"I am well," I answered, in my old dreamy voice. Then I started, and, in spite of my efforts, a something, I know not what, broke its chains within me, and, bursting its bonds like a thread, flung me wildly at Miss Admonitia's feet. Yet I spoke calmly, in a quiet voice, a low, thrilling whisper unnatural to my own ears. "Did I say well? No, Miss Admonitia—I am going mad. Sit still and hear me; I shall die now if you do not let me speak. I am not the poor, tamed, frightened child brought up in loneliness; I am the wild spirit broken loose whom you have nursed in haggard fear—you and Miss Mildred—and fed on mysteries and silent hate. Well, I return it. Hear me—I hate you both. I will not be held in bondage by you. I do not care what compact you have made with my father; I renounce it. I break your bonds asunder. I will *not* be driven mad!"

With dry and fiery eyes I looked up into her face, while my parched lips refused to obey my will, and ceased to speak, as, quivering and pale, they remained parted in trembling eagerness.

"Poor, silly, ignorant child!" said Miss Admonitia, gazing down on me, with the old dusky red flushing hot over her cheeks. "I will try not to be angry at your blind ingratitude and injustice. I will not ruin you by letting you free."

"Leave me alone!" said I, tearing at her hands as she strove to hold me. "Let me go! I shall kill you!"

She released me and flung me from her heavily, as we fling a creature we dislike; but, save that her very brow was dark now with that angry flush, she showed no sign of passion.

"Ah! fling me off like that forever!" said I, in a deep, sulky tone; "and let me tell my father that we are free!"

Miss Admonitia tightened her arms across her chest, and held herself down as we hold some wild animal.

"My God!" she murmured, "have we not suffered enough, I and my sisters, from this race?—and must we nurse a viper of

their blood to sting us? Esther"—and she writhed with the intensity of her disgust towards me—"if it depended on me, I would willingly let you leave us forever; you might go away, a beggar, and perish beneath a hedge. But if I am unmerciful, it is Mildred who will fast and pray—Mildred who will watch and weep for my sin. There—go; for her sake I forgive you. God help me! for what have I not forgiven you and yours for her sake!"

Her stateliness gave way, her face died back to its old paleness, and she sank into a chair, with a perceptible shiver running through her frame. I stood before her unmoved, with my old dreaminess and apathy creeping back chilly upon my brain.

"Well," said I wearily, "then I am in bondage still. Secrets weighing down upon me on every side. A shut door between my father and me—a barrier of dislike growing like a wall, dividing me from my mother, and you and Miss Mildred still pitiless, save for yourselves."

"Stop!" said Miss Admonitia huskily; "you do not know what you are saying. Pity! A tender pity like an angel's has been round you ever since you were born. Speak of your other grief—what is it?—secrets?"

"Yes," said I coldly. My passion was fast fading away, and I was ceasing to care how it ended, or what happened.

"Well, tell me what secrets most torment you, and I will do away with them if I can."

And now, instead of demanding what most interested me, instead of seeking for any clue to my labyrinths, I looked at her with my thoughts afar off dwelling on an old melody which seemed to be floating near me now without my being able to seize it; and I answered stupidly—

"Why have you and Miss Mildred refused to let me learn music?"

"Does that annoy you?" said Miss Admonitia. "Mildred thought it would make you unhappy. We have seen great sorrow spring from these vain accomplishments. But she has changed lately; she wishes now herself that you should learn music."

"Why?" said I, quickly.

"Because—because we know you wish it. Have you any thing else to ask?"

"Yes. What does my mother hate me for?"

"Esther, why does your father love you? You cannot answer me, neither can I answer you. I only know that your mother will never love any human being that your father loves, hence for your sake he would have hidden his affection; but it was enough for her to suspect it; that sufficed her, and brought upon you her aversion. Be content with your father's love—a love so prized that I have seen a daily death of years crush a heart that lost it."

I was silent, with a great throb of compunction at my own heart.

"Have you any thing else to ask, Esther?"

"Yes," said I, turning suddenly towards her with a flash of new energy. "Who is Paul? And if he murdered your sister, why not hunt the villain through the world till he hangs upon the gibbet he deserves?"

Miss Admonitia hid her face in her hands at my bold words, and her figure shrank as if she had received a painful blow. Even when she took her hands away and held one towards me—not to invite my approach, but to waive me off—she still shut her eyes, as we do involuntarily in a spasm of pain.

"I was not sure she heard those mad words of her mother's," she muttered to herself.

She rose hurriedly, as if some feeling were too strong for her, and paced the room, then stopping suddenly behind me, she seized me by the arm and turned my face towards her.

"You meant those words for an insult," she said; "an insinuation against Mildred? Answer."

"Perhaps I did," I replied, doggedly.

A flush came hotly over her face, her eyes flashed fire.

"I don't see why I should show you the great mercy," she cried, "of keeping you in blindness. Mildred can be a saint—I cannot. She can bear uncomplaining your father's hatred and your ingratitude—I cannot. Or if I can bear them for myself, I cannot for her. I will answer your first question. *Paul is your mother's only brother!* Now find out for yourself why we do not hunt him through the world to the gallows."

She released me with a gesture of contempt, and as her hot clasp abandoned my arm I reeled forward and caught her by the gown. Every sudden emotion had a singular effect upon me. My whole brain seemed shaken, and for a moment I always felt stunned, the next I became conscious of some indefinable change in myself, some instantaneous transition of mood and feeling. It was the case now. As her dreadful words pierced me through and through with anguish, my hardness, my apathy, my dull hate vanished, and hiding my face in the folds of her robe, and clinging to her with clasping passionate fingers I burst into bitter tears.

"Oh, Miss Admonitia!" I sobbed, "I deserved that you should tell me this. I understand now, it is mercy to me, mercy to my father, that holds you and your sister back. You let the murderer go free out of pity to his wretched kin."

I wrung my hands, I trembled, I writhed before this new, horrible, and *real* misery. I felt like a worm transfixed by the hook, like a felon shrinking from the burning brand. I clasped Miss Admonitia's knees,

and moaned in my pain like some wounded animal.

My mother's brother the murderer of Alicia! A felon's blood in my veins! a man to be tracked down through the world by his fellow-men, a man around whose villainous shadow there curdled a pool of innocent blood, and whose footsteps were marked by crime—he my uncle, my nearest relative!

"Oh, comfort me! comfort me!" I cried. "Say it is not true! Say you said it to punish me."

Miss Admonitia was greatly moved; she raised me kindly.

"Would to Heaven I could say it was not true, Esther!" she said. "Oh! would I could live these few minutes over again, then I would spare you this. I am not fit to be trusted with a Treganowen by myself. You are a wayward and terrible child, Esther, but Mildred would have borne all your cruel words meekly, and have paid you back with heaped kindness, and you would have left her hating her, and blind as you always have been. Perhaps I have been cruel in opening your eyes, but you must take your share now in our burden, and help us to spare your father. He does not know such a man exists as Paul Polwhele."

I was mad with misery and pain. I could not reply. My pride of birth, my pride of ancestry, my passionate feeling of honor, my joyful innocence, all lay crushed within me, or started up bleeding to protest against this shame.

"Oh let me die!" I moaned, "for how can I live, and bear this degradation?"

Miss Admonitia clasped her hands together with a troubled look, but she forbore to answer me. Perhaps she was thinking of Mildred's long suffering and patience under the shame so unjustly laid on her by the hand she most loved.

"Esther," said Miss Admonitia at last, when I had wept till I was exhausted, "rouse yourself! Your father will soon return from his ride, and you must not show him such a face as this."

"You could not—you could not have known," said I, wringing her hand in mine, "who Paul was when you married my mother to my father?"

"No," answered Miss Admonitia, drily; "when Mildred and I recommended Miss Polwhele to your father, it was not likely we could guess her brother was the murderer of Alicia."

"Then you knew she had a brother," I continued, persistently, "and you helped her to keep this fact a secret from my father?"

"Esther, you *force* me to say cruel things," replied Miss Admonitia, in a shrinking tone. "Must I tell you that your mother lied to me, lied to your father, lied

to Mildred? Must I tell you that she has lied all her life long, and will continue to lie while her life lasts? There—let us finish this painful conversation. She told us her brother was dead; had we known him to be living she would never have been Mrs. Treganowen. We were not ignorant that he had been a wild scamp, but a thief and a murderer we scarcely thought him. But since he is both, and she has concealed his existence from your unhappy father, it remains for us to consider whether for his sake concealment is not the greatest kindness we can show him. Think it over yourself, and divulge the fact if you judge best, only remember *he* will not spare the murderer of Alicia."

I sat silent, in deep consternation. Miss Admonitia had the advantage, and circumstances were too strong for me. I saw my violence to-day had only added an additional weight to my burden, without clearing away a single cloud from the dark mysteries that tormented my life. Doubtless my face expressed somewhat of the utter prostration of feeling that possessed me, for Miss Admonitia responded to it sorrowfully:

"Are you the only one, Esther, that has a grief to bear? Until lately you have been spared, and others have suffered for you. And is it altogether my fault if your load is made heavier to-day by your knowledge of a fact which we would fain have kept from you? Your temper wrung it from me—I did not tell it willingly."

I remained silent beneath her reproach, for I knew I deserved it.

"And now," continued Miss Admonitia, "that you have to share this wretched secret with Mildred and myself, display some of her courage, her resignation, and abnegation of self, and for your father's and mother's sake be silent and careful."

"But is it not wrong, is it not wicked, to let this man escape?" I asked, anxiously, as I felt my face blanch at the thought of crimes the unshackled murderer might yet commit.

"I think so," answered Miss Admonitia, in a tone of deep dejection, "but Mildred differs from me. The great sorrows of her life give her the right to demand what she will of me. She demands that this man shall live. She demands my secrecy, and I give it, although my conscience tells me that I am acting against duty. Yes, my sad opinion is that at *all costs*—life, fortune, honor, peace—it is our duty to denounce this man."

She rose and paced the room, while I, following her agitated movements with my eye, in imagination pursued the dreadful consequences of the murderer's apprehension to their dire end. And yet, in my ignorance, I saw but the plainest, smallest portion of the horror and disgrace that would fall upon

our family. What terrible events and secrets lay unknown which this man's trial would bring to light I guessed not, yet I could see enough to make my flesh creep, and my eyes close in horror with a sick shudder.

"It would kill my father," I ejaculated, in a low voice.

"I know it," answered Miss Admonitia, with a deep sigh, "yet that would not stay his hand for a single moment. He would stretch it out to seize this man, regardless alike of dragging down ruin and death upon himself and others. Silence, Esther, silence, that is our only hope, our only resource. We must leave the murderer to God, and entreat his forgiveness for ourselves if we sin in leaving him to Divine rather than human justice.

"Now," she continued, "let me speak of my reason for coming here to-day. I did not intend our talk should take this turn. Your father has had a long conversation with me, and he has also written fully to Mildred, on the subject of what he terms your delusions. It seems, since your illness, certain ideas remain fixed in your mind, and you cannot rid yourself of them. Then cease the endeavor, Esther; wonder, ponder, and read no more on the subject; fix your thoughts on other things, and these sickly fancies will fade away of themselves. I disapprove of all the books your father has put into your hands. You will get your mind into a morbid state with such studies, till you imagine yourself haunted, or afflicted like the epileptic, cataleptic, and crazy people of whom you are reading. Brain fever is simple enough, and when that passed away, and your health was restored, your memory became partially weakened, until change of air, quiet, and sounder health brought it back to you. There, that's the simple history of your case. Do you find any thing very wonderful in it?"

"Certainly not, if that were all," I replied, in a puzzled way; "but the thing I saw on the roof, that papa affirms that I never really saw, but only fancied—what of that?"

"What of that?" repeated Miss Admonitia, calmly. "I was not speaking of that as a delusion. I understood you had other fancies"—and here she looked at me searchingly. "I perceive nothing wonderful in your having seen our poor old demented servant, Sarah Tregellas."

"Sarah Tregellas!" I exclaimed, in amazement.

"Her stay at Treval was no secret to any one but you, Esther," said Miss Admonitia, with a faint smile. "Poor Sarah was my mother's maid, and Mildred and I felt bound to retain her with us, although she had conceived a strange dislike to us both—a dislike which, at one bitter time of our lives, induced her to do my sister all the injury in her power, which I need not tell you has

gained for her a double kindness and tenderness from Mildred ever since. Never very amiable, Sarah grew childishly vindictive and mischievous in her old age, and in fact she was often dangerous; so we kept her in one of the upper rooms, in charge of a strong, kind nurse. When you came to us we thought there was enough in our ghostly old mansion to frighten you without letting you see, or hear of, poor Sarah. She was at times quite out of her mind, and she was bent nearly double, and had an odd way of creeping along, very ghostly to see to those not used to her, especially when one looked on her mindless, blank face. One thing I can promise you, Esther—she will never terrify you again; she is dead. She died a few nights ago of paralysis."

I remained silent, in a cloud of perplexed thought.

"I wish I had known this before," I murmured, softly.

"This is the first time I have seen you since your recovery," remarked Admonitia; "I don't see how I could have told you earlier. The moment we heard from Clifton, from your father, on what subject you raved during your illness, Mildred and I guessed you had seen Sarah, and we thought the best way to efface your terror was to let you see her every day. Familiarity soon ended the mischief that her apparition on the roof had caused you, though I confess it was a dangerous experiment, and you fainted the very first day we introduced you to Sarah at Treval. Still, every hour undid somewhat of the evil, till at last no one was a kinder nurse to the poor afflicted woman than you."

Miss Admonitia paused. Her brow contracted, her voice faltered, her eyes filled with tears, and it was only by an effort she continued her narrative.

"She was a faithful servant, with all her faults, and her death has grieved us, Esther. I am sorry, too, it should have happened before you had an opportunity of seeing her again. Now your memory is restored to you so clear and strong, the sight of her in all her reality would have completely effaced the dreamy, mysterious image which I fear your brain still retains. But surely you can remember somewhat of your last stay at Treval—you can recollect something of Sarah—something of what I am telling you?"

Miss Admonitia gazed at me with a searching look, and awaited my reply with a suppressed anxiety which I felt rather than saw.

"No, I can remember nothing," I answered, as I shook my head with a decided negative, as my mind made a vain effort to grope through that blank time. "If Jennifer had not told me, I should never have known I had been to Treval. Only, on my recovery, I found strangely effaced from my brain all terror of the figure I had seen.



That is the sole result of my visit to you, Miss Admonitia."

"It is the only result needed," she answered, calmly—"the sole reward Mildred and I desire for our care."

"I—I feel I ought to thank you," said I, falteringly (but the truth was, I never could thank them—never could feel grateful for any thing they did); "doubtless you and Miss Mildred had much trouble with me—much anxiety and fatigue."

"Do not force yourself to be grateful. Esther, when you don't feel it; and there is no need. We did nothing for you—of course not. We could not worry ourselves with a querulous sick girl. We left all that to Martha and the nurse we hired."

She spoke in that hard, dry, sneering tone which had always silenced me when a child. I rebelled against it now, and after a moment's pause for thought, I said, with a slight tinge of sarcasm—

"I presume you made papa aware of Sarah's existence from the first? How was it, then, that he did not simply inform me I had seen her, instead of arguing with me respecting delusions, and procuring me books to prove his assertions?"

Miss Admonitia's face flushed hotly, but she met my gaze with a look of supreme disdain.

"So you have not yet discovered your father's great weakness—superstition? It is not in his nature to give you a true, commonplace explanation of a mystery. Nothing I can say will convince him that you saw Sarah—a poor, harmlessly demented servant woman. The figure you beheld has for him a far more wonderful signification; he believes his lost love, the murdered Alicia, appeared to you, and when he talks to you about delusions it is himself he is trying to soothe and persuade, not you. He scouts the idea of your having seen Sarah. He even refused to name her to you."

I was silenced. I felt to the inmost core of my heart that this was the truth with regard to my father's feelings; my own I could scarcely analyze yet.

"I am very weary of all this talk, Esther," said Miss Admonitia, and she put her hand to her head with a look of pain. "Sing me something as you used to do at Treval; it will do me good. There is your grandmother's harpsichord open, I see. Have you been playing?"

I looked at her in blank astonishment as she spoke, and my first thought was that she was mocking me cruelly.

"You know well," I answered fiercely, "that I cannot play a note. You would not let me learn; and as to singing, you never heard me at Treval. I only sang when I hid in the wood or climbed the trees like a hunted bird. How can you say I ever sang to you at Treval?"

I spoke in a hot, angry tone; yet Miss

Admonitia regarded me calmly, almost pitifully, and the tears again came to her eyes.

"You often climbed the cedar, Esther. Did you ever sing up there among those great dark branches?"

"No, I never sang there," said I, softened. "I was too frightened, too watchful then for— Where did you keep Sarah? I used to see her from the cedar branches, yet I could never find her room."

So sudden and fearful a change came over Miss Admonitia's face that I started up and ran towards her, thinking she was ill. She waived me back with her hand, and faintly asked for a glass of water. I hurried away to fetch it, but when I returned the drawing-room was empty, and the roll of wheels echoed on the gravel. Running to the window, I saw the Treganowen carriage departing, and received the farewell waive of Miss Admonitia's pale white hand.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

I CAN scarcely tell in what state of mind this visit and abrupt departure left me. I was so trammelled, so sickened, so walled round by the horrible fact that a murderer's blood ran through my veins, that I put off thought wearily, saying to myself that I would reflect when the red image of this man Paul grew fainter in my mind. I was not free now to think. It held me tightly, as in a vice, and chained all my faculties to the contemplation of its hideous presence.

When my father returned from his ride he found me still sitting dreamily by the window, looking out with fixed eyes upon the summer sea, which languished with sunshine, lazily laved the shingle on the hot beach.

I roused myself to talk to him, and, by a great effort, dismissing from my mind the dominant figure of Paul now tyrannizing over every thought, I plunged into a crowd of questions bearing on the life and death of the woman Sarah Tregellas.

It was true that she had long lived in a feeble state of mind, kindly succored and cared for at Treval—true that she was only just now dead and buried; but beyond this my father's statements and Miss Admonitia's no longer tallied. According to him, Sarah had long been confined to her bed, paralytic, and incapable of any exertion. To believe that she had crept along the roof from beam to beam the whole length of the western front was for him impossible. He was willing to think the figure a mysterious illusion, which he connected somehow with his approaching presence at Treval, but he would not admit it could have been Sarah. Perhaps his belief went further, and, fancying himself beloved by Alicia, he may have imagined his coming presence at the scene

of his sorrow troubled the poor spirit, and raised her up to meet him, or induced her to show her pallid, woful face to his young daughter. Such thoughts have visited human hearts at times, and to some natures there is no pain and no fear in the fancy. Not to me, however, if he had such a thought, did he show it openly. He contented himself by saying—

"Perhaps Miss Admonitia's motive is good, but I consider she is combatting the morbid impression on your brain dishonestly by a story incredible in itself. The braver course is always the safest, Esther, so I prefer to take it, honestly acknowledging all that is strange in the circumstance, while at the same time I put works into your hands which prove how common such delusions are during disease. Time will show who is the wiser—Miss Admonitia or I."

He left me with these words, and while he thus showed me his own leaning towards the mystic, proving the correctness with which Miss Admonitia's acute penetration had divined his failing, he forgot that he had flung my mind back into a state of doubt and pain, vacillating between the natural and the supernatural, the commonplace and the mysterious, while among these glimmered a third feeling—an instinct like a thread of light—leading me gradually on to the truth.

And yet it was only by crediting Miss Admonitia's statement that I could account for the singular familiarity and cessation of fear with regard to this creeping figure of which I was conscious in my own mind; hence I was inclined to believe her. I say inclined, because behind the inclination lurked a doubt, which grew and expanded, and at last burst into the light of certainty, in which light, when the time came, and my hand was older. I unlocked that secret on the roof, and found my own house not safe from the fear of it. Even now, after long lapse of years, when I remember that time, I am afraid, and trembling lays hold of my flesh. Let me speak of it in the right place. Why should I anticipate, in the history of my childhood, the terrors of my youth?

On the evening after Miss Admonitia's visit my father talked and read with me a long while; but, in spite of the feverish excitement and interest I felt in the books we perused together, and in his anecdotes of strange occurrences, every one of which found an echo within my nervous and mystic nature, there still ever loomed before me the red figure of the man—the murderer, Paul Polwhele. His relationship to me ran hot and loathingly through my veins; his face peered over my shoulder, his hand touched me at each instant, till my flesh quivered with hate and fear. It appeared to me that he was claiming me body and soul, and, though every fibre in my frame

stirred against him with a separate loathing, yet I acknowledged the claim, and shrank and shivered before it helpless. At night, shut in my own room in utter loneliness, I grew worse. I shuddered at the horrible thoughts that crept round me like snakes; I cowered at a shadow; I trembled at every distant sound, till at length, overcome by the inert terror that had grown upon me, I flung myself on my knees by the bedside, with my head on my arms, and in this attitude I remained till my candle burnt down in the socket and went out, leaving me in darkness. Then, in an anguish of fear, still dressed as I was, I crept on to the bed and tried to sleep; but my fevered imagination peopled the room with phantom Pauls, each one murdering Alicia, each one claiming a horrid kin to me, and banishing sleep like the spectres that haunted Macbeth.

In the midst of the darkness and silence, while I was listening to the beating of my own heart, and striving to deaden the horrible wakefulness of my brain, our great door-bell sounded. It clanged and echoed through the sleeping house, breaking on the ear with a noise tenfold louder than it ever uttered by day, yet no one stirred. The sound rushed through every avenue of my sense, vibrating along the darkness and stillness with an unnatural clamor and life, and startling me from my unreal terrors into more human and healthful fears. Just beneath my window stood a small platform of lead, forming the roof of the porch. It had lately by my wish been embellished by vases of growing flowers, which I tended myself, and I remembered now that from this place I could speak to the unwonted visitor, and bid him go to another door, as the bell at the great entrance was too far from the servants' apartments to give him a chance of awakening them. In a moment, with thoughts of disaster, sickness, fire, I know not what, I had opened the window, and stood with my white dress fluttering in the breeze peering downwards with anxious eyes for the midnight disturber of our rest. Whoever he was he had only rung once, but the champ and neigh of a horse beneath on the gravel assured me he had not departed.

"Who is there?" said I, loudly.

"Is it possible?—is that indeed you, Miss Esther? How sorry I am I have disturbed you!" answered a voice which brought my heart with a glad bound to my lips.

"Dr. Spencer!" I exclaimed, as I clasped my hands joyfully. "Why, they told me you had left England."

"Not yet," he replied, cheerfully.

"Oh, how shall I let you in?" I cried. "I cannot undo the bolts of the great door, I am not strong enough, they are so hard. And, besides, I have no candle. Won't you go round to the other door, while I wake the servants?"

"There is no necessity for letting me in at all," said the doctor. "I would not have come, but I saw a light a moment ago in this window, and as it is not long past eleven, I had no idea of finding every one gone to rest but you. On the contrary, I expected to find all the household up excepting yourself, and I came, thinking to make you sleep all the happier by sending you this letter."

"A letter for me!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, from Miss Mildred. She wrote it at nine this evening, and the moment it was finished I started with it. How fortunate I should find you up! But how is it, Miss Esther, that, like a nightingale, you alone are awake?"

"Oh, I have been so miserable!" said I, earnestly; "so afraid!"

"I thought so," answered Dr. Spencer, softly. "Here is your letter: can you reach it?"

I bent down from the roof of the porch, and in the faint moonlight perceived the glimmer of the paper in his hand, which he held up towards me as high as he could reach. Still it was not high enough, and I stretched towards it in vain.

"I cannot get it," said I, sorrowfully, "so you had better bring it to me to-morrow."

"No, you are to have it and read it to-night, and then sleep in peace. Miss Mildred told me it would make you happier, so we'll try what a clamber can do."

In a moment or two, by some means, I found his hand within the grasp of mine, and I had the letter safe. I never thought now of the dark night, or of the loneliness, or of the terrible fears that lay scattered behind me; all became peace, and light, and life, as my slight cold fingers lay within the warm clasp of his hand.

"Do you know I cannot stand very long on this stony cherub?" said Dr. Spencer, laughing; "so please point out to me the fair Jenifer's window, and then I'll jump down."

"Jenifer's window! What do you want of Jenifer?"

"You said you had no light, and I suppose no flint and steel, so I want her to bring you a candle, that you may read your letter. I'll awaken her with a salute of gravel, and send her to you."

"No, no; you shall not take that trouble," I cried. "I'll read the letter to-morrow."

"Which is Jenifer's window, Miss Esther?"

"Oh, don't give yourself so much trouble about me!" I exclaimed, with tears in my voice. "I am not at all afraid now, and I shall sleep without reading the letter."

"Do you wish me to salute every window in the house with pebbles? Where does the fair Jenifer slumber?"

"How obstinate you are!" said I, smiling. "Turn to the right, and count the windows beneath the east turret: hers is the third."

"Good-by, Miss Esther. You look like a fairy there all in white, standing among your flowers."

But though he said "Good by," I did not relinquish his hand.

"When will you come again?" said I, wistfully. "You have been away so long."

"I will come again to-morrow. And the next time I go, I will take you with me if you like."

"Will you?" I exclaimed, with a sudden start of joy. "But no, I cannot leave papa."

"Then we'll carry him off too," said Dr. Spencer. "This cruel cherub won't bear me on his stony wings any longer. He is no angel, he is a veritable imp, thirsting for my life. Good-night. He has not broken my neck, Miss Esther; I am safe."

This was in answer to my exclamation of alarm as he sprang down hastily on my relinquishing his hand.

With another merry "Good-night" he mounted his horse and rode away to the right towards the east turret. By the light of the moon, just rising above the trees, and with the soft summer air blowing around me, I stood and watched him.

How beautiful the night was, how beautiful the sky with its quiet stars, how beautiful the fresh stillness of the air, the low murmur of the sea, and the gentle roll of the shaken pebbles as they wandered back with the returning waves, softly, like the sound of a last kiss! All breathed music, and fell about my spirit like a mantle of peace and loveliness; and the hot fret of fever that had run through my veins, the flush of fear, the burning dread and loathing that awhile ago had chafed me into such a fire of pain were all gone, quenched in this calm, fled away before the charm of a soothing word, and the touch of a kind human hand.

The dash of the gravel against Jenifer's window and the music of a pleasant voice reached me like new notes in the song the summer night now sang to my spirit. The echo of the horse's hoofs, as he galloped away, was like the beating of time to the measure, and every flower and every leaf answered the voices of the night in melody, as they sang out their carol to the silvery sea.

A flash of light from my window roused me from my listening happiness.

"Ah!" it isn't nothing catching could now," said Jenifer, complacently. "You may bide out there all night if you will, Miss Esther; et waient be sought but a pleasure to me, because I shall go arter the doctor in the mornin'. And ef you stops ill for a month, the greater joy and satisfaction

I shall have, Miss Esther; so don't 'ee come in 'pon no account."

Of course I had already entered the room and closed the window before Jenifer finished her oration.

"Well," she said, looking at me with a countenance beaming with delight, "how d'y'e feel, Miss Esther?"

"I feel quite well, Jenifer, thank you."

"Es thic aal you've goet to say? And you doant feel like sunshine all over? nor like quicksilver houlding tha pure gowld? nor like songs of birds running all through your heart? nor like a spring of water in tha sands? Ef you doant feel like all that, I do, Miss Esther."

"How can I feel like sunshine, Jenifer, when it's night?"

"Night!" exclaimed Miss Jenifer; "why, it's the beautifullest day to me that I ever see! Tha day broke tha minute I heerd *his* voice. 'Twas night yesterday, and every yesterday sence the sun sit tha hour he went away. I thought I were dreaming when I heerd the cry, 'Jenifer! Jenifer!' sweet as a gray-bird's whistle tuning in at my window. Then when it comed clearer, my heart tumbled upside down, and I felt as ef a live ennger wes en my throat murdering me weth chokes, for I maade sure he wes dead, I ded. And he's come to tell *me*, I says to myself, bekase he knows I likes his very shadder better than I likes any other man's four bones. He knows ef I wes a princess, rech as butter, cloathed in bank-notes, with guineas to walk upon, I couldn't get up no greater dance en my heart than I does now, whenever hes bright faace comes ento my two eyes. Well, in a minute I hears 'Jenifer! Jenifer!' again, and a thoumping pebble at my winder crazed a squeer, so then I knowed it was his very self en tha warm flesh. And ef you'd only seed, Miss Esther, how quick I got my head out ef winder, and how in waun instant I felt oop to tha roots of my hair in honey, and balm, only weth tha first glint I had en tha moonlight of his comfortable smile—a smile, Miss Esther, that would slock<sup>1</sup> me into a whirlpool arter 'un—"

"Now, Jenifer," I interrupted, "will you be quiet and let me read my letter?"

"Ah! it's a letter from thic wisht ould white raven at Treval, esn't et?" said Jenifer, drily. "I never see sich a oogly ould terror in aall my boarn days, n't I. She's like a bundle of dried bones rustling about in a silken garment. I should be skeered to touch ort b'longing to her."

Nevertheless, Janifer, to whom all writing was a cabalistic and unknown mystery, peered over my shoulder curiously as I read these words:

"MY DEAR CHILD—Admonitia has grieved me by confessing that, in her anger, she told

<sup>1</sup> *Slock* is to entice.

you of your relationship to Paul. I cannot deny this truth, though I would give much to have spared you the pain of knowing it. But one sorrow—the most terrible—I can completely lift from your heart. Admonitia is mistaken, your mother is mistaken: Paul's hand never touched my sister. He is innocent of that blood. Believe me, I *know* that he is innocent. If I did not know it should I let him go free? It is to avoid uselessly laying bare to the eyes of a gaping world all this ghastly history of blood and sorrow that I refuse to pursue this man. Why should I dig up my sister's name from its grave? why rack your father's heart? why disgrace him, you, and your mother by arresting an innocent man—innocent, I mean, of this crime, though many other guilty deeds of his would doubtless come to light, sufficient to overwhelm you all with shame and pain. Never fear, Esther, I shall not touch him. Sleep in peace. Paul Polwhele's hand is innocent as mine of the blood of my sister; whatever his crimes may be, the murder of Alicia Tremaine is not one of them. I say this who know it.

"Your friend and mother,  
"MILDRED TREMAINE."

An immense weight seemed taken off my heart as I read this strange letter, and a feeling of gratitude for the first time softened my hard thoughts of Miss Mildred.

"Aw! my dear Miss Esther," said Jenifer, rousing me abruptly from the soothing thankfulness and relief in which I was steeped, "what a bufflehead I be! While you've bin reading I've been thinking whether you couldn't teach me to write, and make me a lady."

"I'll teach you to write if you like, Jenifer."

"But you caent make me a lady, miss?" responded Jenifer, with a sigh.

"Are you not happy as you are, Jenifer?"

"I think if I wes a dog I'd be happier. When is he coming again, Miss Esther?"

"To-morrow, Jenifer."

"That's a blessing, any way. But what a long night this 'll be! I think when you're in bed, Miss Esther, I'll go out and sit on the white gate-post at the end of tha revenue."

"What on earth for, Jenifer?" said I, laughing.

"I shall see the fust of 'un then as he comes oop tha road."

"Why, Jenifer, he may not come till eleven or twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"That needn't hender me from sitting on tha post, miss. Thic's no time for a dog to wait. I've seen our Trim wait a whole day for master. Miss Esther," continued Jenifer solemnly, "I reckon sure I'm turning into a dog, I've growed that watchful, and steady, and patient, and I'm thankful for so little. A croom of kindness makes me feel like walking to the world's end to pay 'un, a look

puts a laugh onto all my veins, and ef he aunly stands en my eyesight for a minute I'm as grateful as I am for sunshine. My eyes feel warm and alight, filled up with his face. It does me so much good to look at 'un, that ef I had tha rechest mine en tha county, I'd give all tha ore, fast as it comed to grass, only to pay 'un for standing somewhere every day where I could see 'un for two minutes. Is that like a dog, Miss Esther?"

"Something, Jenifer," said I, sleepily, as I laid my head on the pillow.

"I could talk till sunrise, but you are tired, so good-night, miss. If I was a lady like you, growing up beautiful like you," said Jenifer, wistfully, turning as she reached the door, "I'd love 'un not like a dog, but like a woman."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

I STOLE, early in the morning, into our great drawing-room, and seated myself in a huge arm-chair, where my small form seemed quite lost, swallowed up as it were by the mass of oak and damask on which I sat. Those were the days when scanty garments neither hid a grace nor gave one, so no voluminous folds of drapery or cumbrous crinoline magnified the diminutive proportions of my tiny figure as I leant back in the crimson chair, with feet scarcely touching the ground.

My pen is soon about to quit this period of my life, but ere it leaves Esther Tregan-owen the child, let it endeavor to draw her picture for you.

Imagine a small oval face, intensely white, crowned by a mass of waving chestnut hair, so long and thick that it was a marvel; a forehead too massive for the thin cheeks; a mouth too firm for a child, and eyes so strange and solemn that I was afraid at times to meet them in the glass. I had a fancy that it was these witch-like eyes that kept me companionless, that made the servants whisper together about me, that caused strangers to call me old, or talk of elves and pixies when I passed. The peculiar expression they held I can only convey to your mind by the word *lost*; a lost look swam in their deep darkness, painful, searching, mysterious, which stirred the heart with an emotion half fear, half wonder. Hence people as they gazed became conscious of wild thoughts concerning me, floating doubts and surmises which touched on all that is mystic and strange in our nature. Let me add that one glance from these eyes of mine instantly destroyed indifference. I was liked or disliked at once—oftenest the last—for they excited an intense curiosity. I was seen to be a secret, a something to unravel, and where curiosity exists indifference dies.

The setting of these orbs, their brows and lashes were raven-black, making a strange contrast with my hair, which seemed to hold a sunbeam running through its darkness, giving warmth to my face, and taking from it the chill look which the intense whiteness of my complexion would otherwise have lent to it. Yet even this sunniness of hair helped to give me a strange look, for in shadow the heavy tresses appeared almost black, while in light they gleamed with a golden lustre like a glancing fire. I seemed a witch wearing some unholy halo; and in after days a voice I dearly loved would often call to me playfully to come out of the sunlight and quench the sorceress's fire dancing around my head.

Do you know me now, or can you only bring before your eyes the aged Esther, whose blanched hair and familiar figure bear for you no mystic gleam, and whose calm face, humanized by many a line of sorrow, shows that suffering is the link that binds all human beings together, and makes the rarest nature akin to the commonest?

Let us be thankful for grief: it humanizes, it destroys the dreamy, selfish egotism round which imagination, in never-tiring coils of self-exalting thought, winds long silken threads of reverie, bright with golden riches, all heaped up before the idol self. Suffering throws this false god down, and leads the soul to the worship of the true, and all the treasures of the spirit offered once on the hideous altar of self, where they dwindled or rankled into sin, are poured out now in a full tide of blessing to others. Tenderness, pity, love flow forth from the wounded heart given to God, and peace follows. The Shadow of the Fall, with its mystic pain, its look not human, full of unreason, lost, fades from the brow, and, looking on the face of one thus redeemed, we behold it as the face of a MAN.

Oh, my children, for whom I write, if in these withered features, careworn and aged, you see only the face of a *woman*, let me hope that sorrows have not passed over me in vain, and that I do well to say, let us be thankful for grief!

See how far behind in memory Esther the aged, while she sketched her portrait, has left the child-girl seated in the arm-chair. Long ago I entreated your pardon for these garrulous breaks in an old woman's narrative, so I make no new apology as I gather up the dropped thread of my story.

For whom was I waiting thus in silent watchfulness, my nerves athrob with expectation? Not for the hero of that golden web which day by day my fancy wove in radiant colors. Flashing into the mirror of hope, there came a face illumined by romance, which imagination exalted into the place of worship. The kind, the homely, the true, the tender were too near, too easy of reach, and my heart passed them over to yearn

after the unattainable. Nevertheless, there was something so thoroughly human and sympathetic in Dr. Spencer's nature, that, dazzled as I was by the image of my own romance, I could not remain unresponsive to its magnetic influence. I can only truly describe him in the homely words used by Shakespeare in depicting such another character—"He was kind and comfortable." And, yielding to this indescribable charm of comfort, home, ease, my shut-up spirit ventured to leave its shy loneliness, and warmed itself in the joy that seemed to glow around his presence like an atmosphere. My frozen heart thawed in this radiance of life and love, flowing from the generous fountain of his soul like light flows from the sun, freely, spontaneously, unconsciously; no wonder, then, was it that, all aglow with joy and hope, it beat now with happy throbs, expecting him.

Not daring to speak to my father of Miss Mildred's letter, lest he should ask to see it, I had dreaded to mention the doctor's visit; and finding in the morning that none knew of it but Jennifer and myself, I remained silent altogether, glad thus to escape questioning. Hence it was that my father had gone out ignorant that a visitor was expected, and I sat alone in the great drawing-room, with the sunshine just turning to flame the crimson damask of the chair, and lighting up the sorceress's wavy fire that crowned my white face. With my small thin hands clasped and lying on my lap, I sat with outward patience, a thousand hot thoughts throbbing in my brain, and one strong purpose ever coming nearer and clearer from out the mist of dreams and darkness in which I lived. A hurried step, and my heart leapt with a glad bound, escaping from this haze of thought into the sunshine, as Jennifer dashed into the room breathless, exclaiming—

"Miss Esther, he's coming!—he es! But he's fine and wisht looking, and changed, sure enough. I'm bedoled to see 'un, I be. Ax 'un what's the matter, Miss Esther, wont 'ee!"

With a deep sigh and a rapid pantomime of amazement and distress, Jennifer made her escape a moment before the doctor entered. He regarded me with great earnestness, and—I could not help the passing fancy—with somewhat of the same curiosity with which a botanist examines a specimen of rare plant or flower; then he bowed to me gravely, and sat down opposite, like a visitor waiting to be entertained by his hostess. I kept my hands folded on my lap, and surveyed him with equal dignity.

"Have you had a pleasant ride hither, Dr. Spencer?"

"Very, Miss Treganowen, thank you."

"Did you come over this morning from Treval?"

"Not from Treval, but from Treval Church-town, as you say here, where I have been staying with my uncle, Mr. Winterdale."

I was conscious of a start of surprise flushing my face, but I only said, quietly—"Is Mr. Winterdale your uncle?"

"He is my mother's brother, Miss Esther."

The flush died out of my face, and I grew pale, paler than my own natural pallor, as his words brought, like a flash of sharp fire, the red image of Paul to my eyes. I heard his next words indistinctly, as we hear things in pain and sickness.

"Did that letter make you happier last night?"

"Yes, thank you, it made me much happier."

I could not help the look of pain, the deep sigh with which I spoke.

"Then it was really a kindness in Miss Mildred to write it?" said the doctor, doubtfully.

My eyes met the searching glance of his with a sudden, sharp sympathy. We both, then, suspected Miss Mildred—justly or unjustly—of something.

"Yes, it was *really* a kindness."

"I am glad of it," answered the doctor.

"But as I was bringing the letter, I was undecided whether I would fling it into the sea or deliver it into your hands, especially as I was bidden on no account to give it to the colonel. Have you shown it to him this morning, Miss Esther?"

"I have not said a word to him," I replied, as a painful sensation rose in my throat. "Please not to speak of the letter to papa; it would hurt him to know any thing about it."

An impatient movement of the hand expressed the doctor's vexation.

"Secrets between your father and you, Miss Esther!"

"It is not my fault if they tell me to be secret. And, then, if it would hurt my father to know?"

I felt my anxious look of unchildish thought and fear was withering my face into age as I spoke, and a something too painful for words quivered in the unnatural tones of my young voice. The doctor was touched with pity; he rose suddenly, then sat down again.

"Poor child!" he murmured; "the crown flames with sharp torture, I see. Come out of that sorcerer's fire, Miss Esther, which makes you look like a witch at the stake, and sit here by me. There is a sinister portrait frowning above you, with a ban on his lips, as though he rejoiced in that bristling atmosphere of pain which, to my fancy, flames around you there. Come and face him, and defy him from this place at my side."

It was the same Treganowen whose

scowling face had looked down on my mother as she slept, when her brother, full of treachery and theft, stole upon her out of the darkness, and I thought of this scene as I obeyed the doctor, changing my seat to one by his side on the sofa.

"This is a good change," he said, smiling and patting my cheek. "The fire has died out from these rippling waves of hair, and they are nearly black now. I like them best thus. So we must obey—say nothing about her letter?"

"For papa's own sake," I faltered.

I looked up and caught the doctor's deep gray eyes fixed earnestly, searchingly on my face. It was not the first time I had met that glance, half penetrating, half compassionate, and my gaze fell before it.

"They burden and torture your young mind with secrets," he said, "as carelessly as if no sickness, no disease ever grew out of an over-tried brain."

"Perhaps they cannot help it," said I, sorrowfully, as I thought of the chain of circumstances that had led to one strange mystery after another, crowding into my knowledge.

"Let us hope they cannot," he answered, gravely.

Shrinking from the thought of Paul, ever hovering near me in this talk, I abruptly changed the conversation.

"You are much altered, Dr. Spencer; have you been ill?" I asked.

"I have been suffering a little, but I am quite well now," he answered, carelessly.

I have said, that it was not till after a lapse of years that I became acquainted with the true circumstances of his illness, and long absence from Treganowen. Fearing any new shock might attack my still trembling health, all had been carefully kept secret from me, and, indeed, the fact of his being wounded was known only to his uncle and his old housekeeper. The villagers and his friends, including my father, were simply told that he was ill, and even this information was not granted to poor Jenifer. Fearing the discretion of her tongue in her long conferences with me, she was merely told that he had left Treganowen; hence her idea that he was gone to "furrin parts."

On how slight a thread hangs our fate! Had Dr. Spencer divulged the truth to me now, it must have been followed by implicit confidence on my part, and the web which we took so many years to unravel might have been cut in a day. But he turned lightly from the subject of his changed looks, saying with a smile—

"So you thought I was gone abroad again, and I hear you never even asked for me."

"I asked Jenifer," said I, blushing deeply, and then laughing a little.

"What does that laugh mean?" demanded the doctor.

But I shook my head and gave him no answer. And as I reflected on poor Jenifer's eccentric devotion, and the ease and unwittingness with which he had gained it, the thought struck me that his was one of those happy natures that attract, destined to be loved everywhere without effort, while mine repelled, and I might give "all the substance of my house for love and it would avail me nothing."

"Jenifer likes you very much," said I, sadly. "No one will ever like me."

"My poor child," answered the doctor, "you fancy so because you have never lived with any *human beings* since you were born. No wonder you look a thousand years old, and your little face is white and solemn as a sibyl's."

I glanced at him as he spoke, and as his gray eyes, flashing into a smile, lit up with the "summer lightning of a soul full of summer warmth," it seemed to me that his was the brightest, sunniest face I had ever seen, and so young, so much younger than mine, though I was fourteen and he was twenty-four.

I gave him back his smile, and then I clasped my fingers together nervously, and looked at him with great eyes fixed and solemn.

"You are thinking that if you are very old I am very young, and you are afraid to say it."

I nodded assent, then as I continued my rapt gaze, a slight quiver came into my lips, as I felt a sort of wonder stealing over me at sight of so much youth and happiness. I had never seen it before, never known it.

"You are quite right, Miss Esther," said the doctor, his whole face breaking into a play and flash of merriment; "my age is ten. Let us have a game of battledore and shuttlecock. No, not here in this room. We should batter the noses of the family portraits, and that wouldn't be respectful. Out there, please, in that pretty court, where the fountain is playing with the sunshine."

"If you like," said I, timidly, rather thinking battledore and shuttlecock beneath my dignity; but I was not of this opinion long. It was a magic wand the doctor wielded, not a battledore, and we played, and laughed, and shouted, and talked till my eyes sparkled, and my veins ran with new life, and my wan cheeks flushed healthfully, and a child grew out of the game with whom the weird, wistful Esther Treganowen was but too little acquainted.

If I talked and laughed, the doctor talked and laughed more. He never flagged a moment, but kept the shuttlecock flying in the midst of scattered jests, and glee, and anecdotes, which came pouring from his tongue musically, like a sparkling waterfall of words.

"There goes the shuttlecock in the foun-

tain, Miss Esther, which shows your arm is tired at last. I think I could eat some peaches—could you?"

"Yes, and I'll ring—"

"No, you won't. We'll go into the garden and gather them ourselves."

### CHAPTER XXX.

We strolled into the garden as happily as though no unnatural care or terror had ever sat upon my heart; and we gathered peaches, we shook down and wasted plums, pears, and apricots till we drove the gardener wild, while our jests and laughter rang high up into the summer air, and the little birds twittered in the branches in mimic emulation of our merriment.

It was long past noon when we came in by the small door under the east turret, and I caught a glimpse of Jenifer's face peering over the winding stairs, beaming with such admiring worship and happiness that I could not repress a smile.

"Another sly laugh!" exclaimed the doctor, "and you will not tell me what it means?"

"It means that Jenifer thinks you the best and handsomest man in the world."

"And you laugh at her, when you ought rather to admire her good taste and excellent sense! Jenifer!" he called, "don't run away—we want you."

"Can I bring you some lunch, sir?" asked Jenifer, in great confusion.

"I never refuse any thing nice," said the doctor; "so if you have something very good that Miss Esther and I shall like you may bring it."

Radiant with delight, Jenifer soon laid before us cold partridge and tongue, a dish of honeycomb clear as amber, a cluster of grapes, a plate of purple figs, and a bowl of clouted cream, the whole flanked by a bottle of Admiral Treganowen's old Madeira.

"Jenifer, I look upon you as a genius," said the doctor, helping me with that care and pleasure which make one glad to eat. "Do you think you and I and Miss Esther could live together comfortably?"

"'Twould be going to heaven afore one's time," said Jenifer, in a fiery glow of delight.

"Not a bit of it, Jenifer; I'm a domestic tyrant. In whatsoever house I find myself, there I'm master for the time being. Even the cat has to give way to me. If I took a fancy to the place where she lay curled up on the hearth-rug I should turn her out and take it. In fact, I will have my own way everywhere."

"But yours es such a nice way, sir," said Jenifer, "that every one likes you to have it."

After which speech, being excessively

frightened at her boldness, Jenifer hid behind the doctor's chair, and made imploring gestures to me for permission to depart; but he, sympathetic as iron to the magnet, divined her wish instantly.

"No, Jenifer, you cannot go—we want you to wait at table. We hate the men servants—that is, Miss Esther does; one is too soft-footed—the Indian—and walks like a cat, and we—that is, Miss Esther—always think he is going to spring on her; and the other is too heavy-footed, and walks like an elephant, and we—Miss Esther again—expect every moment to be trampled on and crushed."

"How can you know exactly the nonsense I think?" said I, getting very red.

"I wish all your thoughts were as easy to read as these," answered the doctor. "Now, I know it would be good for your health if every secret of your heart were poured in here"—touching his ear, which was wonderfully small, and shaped like a little pink seashell—"but while you are in this fortress you will not do it, for which reason I intend to take you and Jenifer to live with me."

Here Jenifer made such a comical face of surprise and joy, that I leant back in my chair and laughed aloud.

"And when I have you in my own house," continued the doctor, not permitting himself to be interrupted by my laughter; "in my own house, where I am the master of all, down to the tiniest mouse that squeaks—and he doesn't squeak without my leave—you'll soon come of your own accord, and ask me to read you as I read a book; and immediately after you have deposited every secret into my keeping, that solemn, sorceress mask you wear on your face will drop off, the flames that creep through your hair will die out, the wandering, lost look in your eyes will change to—"

"Peace and love found at last," broke in Jenifer; and then she immediately stopped, nigh scared to death at her own audacity.

"Really, Jenifer, you are very intelligent," observed the doctor. "I could not have finished better myself. What do you say?—do you care enough for Miss Esther to go with her?"

"Jenifer does not care for me," said I; "at least, she did not till you tended and nursed me. She has cared since."

The doctor took this as easily as he took every thing else.

"Ah, well," he said, "then Jenifer will come to oblige me. Jenifer, you see that little girl there, so small that her wisdom surprises us, like the loud song of a tiny bird, that makes us wonder how so small a thing can hold so big a sound—well, she is *my* bird, a little bird that I tended back to life when it lay fluttering in death's grasp, and therefore I love it. A rare bird of curious plumage, Jenifer—sombre feathers



above, bright beneath—a bird that gives songs in the night—”

“What can he mean?” I thought.

“—That startle some ears, but please mine. Will you come, Jenifer, and guard my bird from all cats and other evil things?”

“Especially them cats at Treval,” said Jenifer.

The doctor, I fancied, started slightly, but he permitted Jenifer to continue.

“In course, sir, I’ll go to the world’s end if you like.”

“And if I go away, will you watch over her as a faithful dog would?”

“Well, it sims I am to be a dog, sure enough,” murmured Jenifer, “sence he caals me one his aun self. I’ll do that-same, sir, sence you ask et.”

“And if she should sing in the night, or fly away to some distant land, returning very sad and weary, Jenifer, you’ll promise me never to be *afraid* of my birdie again?”

Jenifer turned pale, and looked at me with a strange glance; then she scanned the doctor’s face, and replied hurriedly—

“There esn’t nothng as *you* don’t know, sir. There, ef ’twas fire and waeter as I had to wade through, or mountains full of wild beasties and snakes to climb, ef you axed me I should go, sir; so I promise, though Miss Esther is a wisht bird to tend at times.”

“Thank you for your promise, Jenifer; you’ll keep it, I know. You are are a good girl, and henceforth I put you on my list of friends, and shall guard a place for you in my memory, that no one wiser, or richer, or more beautiful shall ever take away.”

And so saying, the doctor stretched out his hand to Jenifer, further rewarding her by a look from his marvellous eyes and a smile from his kind lips, for which, I feel sure, could she have performed any impossible task—such as walking round the world upon her head, or permitting hot steaks to be cut out of her body, like an Abyssinian cow—she would immediately have done it. As it was, she hurried away with her little pert nose excessively red, for all the tears she dared not let fall got into the tip and stung it.

“Poor Jenifer!” said I, when she was gone. “Why do you make her so fond of you?”

“I?” cried the innocent doctor; “I have not done any thing in the world to make her fond of me. Would you have me beat her, Miss Esther, or treat her like a dog?”

“There is nothing she’d like better,” said I, laughing. “The fact is, you certainly ought to be obliged to wear a mask: your face is a sort of trap to catch hearts.”

“No, it only catches sunbeams.”

“And sends them forth again,” said I.

“Ah! at fourteen you pay me compliments,” said the doctor, smiling; “at seventeen, like the cuckoo in June, you will change your note, and your opinion too,

doubtless. Old as you are, Miss Esther, in your solemn ways, you are still child enough to give me your thoughts naively now; but what a closed book you will be to me then!”

His words flushed my face with a sudden red, and I caught up the apple rind which my fingers had shaped into an S, and threw it carelessly into my plate; then I changed the conversation abruptly.

“Is all this you have been saying a jest?” I asked; “or are you in earnest?”

“I am in earnest. I want you to come to Clifton to live with me and my mother. Her brother has already written to her about you!”

His mother’s brother! The words echoed mournfully in my ears, like a spirit-voice whispering of Paul Polwhele. Oh! if I had told Dr. Spencer of this man now, and he had been candid with me, not fearing my childish years, what misery we should have spared each other!

But this was not to be till the appointed time, and until many a false light had led us both astray.

“Your father,” continued the doctor, “has been consulting with Miss Tremaine on the propriety of sending you to school. But a school would not do for you, Miss Esther; I told Miss Mildred so last night.”

“A school!” I exclaimed, and I felt my heart stand still at the thought. I, who had never had a companion, to be thrown among thirty or forty strange girls, to be subject to their curiosity and constant presence! I shrank from the idea as one would shrink from the rack. Moreover, my life of freedom, loneliness, and wild thought would render the restraints, the monotony, and routine of a school maddening to me.

“I should die,” said I, simply looking into the doctor’s face with my eyes full of fear.

“I have no doubt of it,” answered Dr. Spencer, in a tone of quiet conviction. “A fashionable boarding-school would be a cruel cage for such a bird as you. What would they do with you, I wonder?”

And he seemed amused by some thought in his own mind.

“In a week you would mystify the whole establishment; in a month you would be looked upon as a sort of witch, and be avoided by everybody.”

“They would all hate me, I know,” said I sadly. But I should not trouble them long; I should die. Yet why should I think of it? Papa will not send me.”

“But Miss Mildred will,” said the doctor.

I turned my pale face towards him, and my heart trembled. I felt my father had no power against Miss Mildred’s will.

“But you will save me,” said I, putting my hand into the doctor’s, and looking into his eyes beseechingly.

“Fold your wings, little bird; you have

a safe nest here. He put his arm around me as he spoke. "You shall not die, and you will not be hated when you are with my mother and me."

I clung to him and hid my face on his shoulder. I was so small, so fearful and fluttering, that I nestled within his sheltering arm truly like a frightened bird, and felt soothed and calmed as he stroked my hair and spoke to me gently.

"And will Miss Mildred let me go with you?" I asked.

"Wonder of wonders, she consents! She relaxes her grim hold on you for three years, at the end of which time you are to return to Treval. That is her bargain with me."

"How did you get her consent?" I cried, astonished.

"It was not I who got it, it was Mr. Winterdale. He went up to Treval and saw Miss Mildred himself."

"Saw Miss Mildred?" My amazement took away my breath. "Why, they never saw each other's faces when I was at Treval."

"They saw each other a few days ago," answered the doctor, smiling. "And I suppose my uncle has some powerful spell to subdue the strong will even of an enchantress like Miss Mildred, for, as I tell you, she consented, although last week I found her hard as a rock. She had fixed on some school at Exeter, kept by an old lady related to the Polwheles, and with this person she relied on your being kindly treated and highly educated, and she would hear of your going nowhere else. It seems she is just as anxious now for you to become accomplished as she was once to deny you all accomplishments, so you must work hard, for I have promised her great results from your three years' stay at Clifton."

All this was so strange, so unexpected to me, that I felt bewildered, and asked no more questions.

"My chief reason for wishing you to come with us—" But here the doctor stopped embarrassed, and looked at me searchingly. Perhaps my face in its blank wonder gave him the answer he needed, for he continued now without hesitation, "The reason is that my mother has already in her charge a young lady whose companionship will do you good. It was her presence, however—which I *know* will be so beneficial to you—that made Miss Mildred's great objection to your joining our household, an objection which seemed insuperable till Mr. Winterdale overcame it."

I did not answer. I was thinking, and my thoughts vexed me. The fact is, I did not like this interference of Mr. Winterdale in my affairs. I felt it as an indignity offered to my father.

"Your uncle appears to be a very persuasive man," said I, drily.

"I cannot explain his influence with Miss Mildred," answered the doctor.

"But it is rather singular he should interest himself in my affairs and in this other young lady's too, for I remember now you told me in the garden your mother, at Mr. Winterdale's persuasion, had taken charge of a little girl of my age."

"In her case he did it to oblige your father."

As Dr. Spencer uttered these words my heart beat rapidly with a sudden suspicion, and my lips trembled.

"Her name is Alice!" I exclaimed, fiercely. "And I hate that girl!"

"You hate her!" repeated the doctor, in a voice of surprise and pain.

"I hate her!" said I, decidedly, in a cool, hard tone.

"Why?" asked Dr. Spencer, and I could not but notice the intense expectation and eagerness of his look as he awaited my answer.

"How can I tell you why?" I replied, impatiently. "I feel that I hate her, that's enough."

"Is it possible you can remember any thing about her?" he demanded, with his hand on my wrist, as though my pulse had a tongue to tell him.

"I recollect nothing," said I, uneasily, for I feared his penetration would probe deep as that old ash-root in the garden; "but I know I saw this girl at Bath. Jenifer told me that, and also that she was an orphan left in my mother's charge by a friend in India. For days, weeks, as I was getting better, I waited for my father to give me some information respecting this adopted child, whom my mother loves better than she loves me, but he has never spoken, and I have been too proud to ask questions."

Tears were in my eyes as I finished, but I felt defiance, hatred, and jealousy vibrating through my frame, rustling the very hair on my head like creeping fires, as I proudly brushed the tears away.

"I believe it is true," said Dr. Spencer, sadly, "that your mother regards Miss Weston with a singular affection; yet it is not to be wondered at: she is a lovable and beautiful girl."

My heart swelled almost to bursting, but I made no reply.

"And your father has never told you that he is her guardian?"

"No."

I did not add that, in the pride and secretiveness of my nature, I had scorned to mention to him this unknown Alice, perhaps preferring the mystery which left me free to brood in gloomy surmising and hatred over her name.

"She is with my mother now, as Colonel Treganowen deemed it his duty to place her with some lady who—*who*—"

Dr. Spencer seemed searching for some expression he could not find.

"Who would not spoil and ruin her as mamma did," said I, bitterly.

"Well, Mrs. Treganowen kept her up late and her health suffered, that was it, I believe. Do you really dislike her so much that her presence will be disagreeable to you? If so, I am truly sorry, for it was my obstinacy on this point which overruled even Miss Mildred's adamant will."

I looked into his face for an explanation, and he continued with, I thought, a slight embarrassment of manner—

"Miss Esther, you have never had a companion, I believe you have never even spoken to a child, in your life."

"Except Tom Pengrath."

The doctor smiled and went on.

"Well, of all the needs for which your spirit thirsts, the need of companionship is the keenest; therefore, when my uncle made certain request of me—never mind what—I insisted, as the strictest article of our treaty, that Miss Weston and you should be companions under my mother's roof, and, unless he gained Miss Mildred's consent to this, I refused, with all the pertinacity of my nature, to—in fact, to make myself agreeable to him in any way. I prided myself the more on my victory because he and Miss Mildred, antagonistic in all else, were, unknown to each other, secretly of accord in this. They both wished you to be alone at my mother's, and it was only my firmness that gained the day."

This explanation both irritated and bewildered me. What right had Mr. Winterdale to interfere in my affairs? I could brook Miss Mildred's most galling chain with more patience than I could bear even a touch from him. I did not care to go to his sister's now, and Alice Weston's presence would be no comfort or privilege to me. I scorned the thought.

"And had my father no voice in the disposal of his only daughter?" said I, with my lips trembling.

"Oh, Esther," answered Dr. Spencer, in a sorrowful tone, "how you mistake me! Should I presume to act without his wish? Miss Mildred is not aware of it, neither is my uncle; but my obstinacy on this point was prompted as much by what I saw was his most eager desire as by my own conviction that this young lady's presence would increase your happiness. In a letter which I wrote to him immediately on my recovery from—from that sickness which you say has changed me, I reminded him of the wonderful benefit you derived during your illness from the companionship of his ward, and I proposed you should be educated together at my mother's. The eagerness with which he seized my proposal showed how much it pleased him, and the sorrow with which he expressed his conviction that no power on earth would ever gain Miss Mildred's con-

sent to it induced me to make use of my uncle as the lever to move her iron will. How I have fought, how immovable and obstinate I have been, you do not know, Miss Esther. And now you render my victory useless by telling me you hate Miss Weston."

He paused for my reply, but I remained a moment in deep thought. What he had just said altered considerably the phase of the question. Miss Mildred, then, openly desired I should be companionless at Mrs. Spencer's, Mr. Winterdale secretly wished it, and if both were overruled by the superior firmness of Dr. Spencer, this he assured me was only exerted because he instinctively divined my father's wishes. It was victory to thwart both Miss Mildred and Mr. Winterdale; it was empire to please my father and myself. I began to waver in my feelings respecting Alice.

"Well, must I send Miss Weston away?" asked Dr. Spencer, sadly. "You have but to speak."

"You would not send her away to please me," said I, in a low tone.

"Would I not?" answered the doctor, smiling. "Miss Alice Weston has the health and spirits of a colt; she does not *want* me—you do. Moreover, she has a hundred friends—you have but three or four."

"And who are they?" I asked.

"Your father, Jenifer, myself, and Prudence White."

I noticed his omission of my mother's name, as well as Miss Admonitia's and Miss Mildred's; but I passed them over when I spoke.

"And why not put Mr. Winterdale on my list of friends?" said I.

Dr. Spencer's face flushed painfully.

"My uncle is rather eccentric," he said, "in his likes and dislikes."

I was certain he hated me, and I wanted nothing more now to assure me that he had some end in view, not friendly, when he persuaded Miss Mildred to place me with his sister.

"Well, is Miss Weston to go or stay?" said the doctor, abruptly.

Now that the choice was left to me, I could not help confessing that I had a burning curiosity in my heart to see this Alice who could "play, and sing, and speak French," and who was as tall as the notch in the old ash-root against which I had measured my small stature so often this summer.

"Do you think I shall like her?" said I, evasively.

"You loved her very much when you were ill at Bath, where she nursed you like a sister, and I feel sure you will love her again, and find her companionship a great pleasure. Your father is delighted at the thought of your being together. Now we have conquered Miss Mildred, who stood

against us like adamant, will you make our victory of no avail by refusing to be this young lady's friend? Will you cause your father so bitter a disappointment?"

"No," said I, and I put my hand in the doctor's. "It will seem very strange to me to be with a girl of my own age. I shall be frightened. I don't think I shall like *this* Alice, but I will try."

"Esther!" said my father's voice.

There was something so exquisitely painful in its cadence, that I looked up startled. He was standing in the doorway contemplating us, with a face so pale, so wrung as if by some sharp agony, that my words were arrested on my lips. I ran towards him, then stopped, for he had sunk into a chair and covered his face with his hands. There was a moment's deep silence—a silence so painful that I felt it in every nerve of my frame, yet could in no way understand its meaning. Dr. Spencer walked to the window, and stood there looking out upon the garden. I put my hand shyly, timidly on my father's arm; he looked up, and, suddenly drawing me towards him, kissed me.

"Has Dr. Spencer told you I am going away soon, Esther?" he said, in his old tone of voice.

"I have told her the arrangement you have made for her stay with Mrs. Spencer," said the doctor, looking round; "but not the reason that rendered it necessary."

I stood trembling, glancing from one to the other.

"Esther, my regiment is ordered to Lisbon, and I join it there immediately. I have not dared to tell you this before; I thought it would grieve you too much. For some time Admonitia and I have been debating the subject of your education, and while I still had to combat Mildred's desire to send you to school at Exeter, I would not say a word to you; but now that we have made so happy an arrangement for your future, I no longer fear to tell you that I am obliged to go. But I give you another companion, one of your own age, whom I hope you will love very much."

My father stooped hurriedly and kissed me again. Stunned by the sad news he gave me, I clung to him without speaking.

"Now go, my dear; I have much to say to Dr. Spencer."

I bade adieu to the doctor, and hastened away, agitated, trembling. While I had been dreaming listlessly, never marking the daily course of events, all this had been decided concerning me. And my father was to leave England! Henceforth his life would hang on the chances of battle, and I who had during this long time seen him every day, and counted the blessing so little, might hereafter yearn for a sight of his face in vain.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

THE bright days dropped into the sea tranquilly, each one dwindling the sands of time that counted our stay at Treganowen. No existence apparently could be more monotonous, more unvaried than mine; but my outer and inner life were at war. My sensitive and imaginative temperament had been fostered to a dangerous height by the loneliness and peculiar circumstances of my childhood at Treval; like the magnetic needle, I trembled at every touch. My nature, if I may so express myself, had *no rind*, hence every breath of feeling influenced me. To those clothed in a thick cuticle it will seem exaggeration to say that I suffered a positive physical pain when I found myself under the influence of hate, malice, or ill-temper; but the less fortunate who have their nerves laid bare to every wind will understand and believe me. To them do I relate the two incidents that marked my last month at Treganowen.

I was sitting by the side of a little arched well in a sequestered part of the grounds, many a shadow flickering over me, and many a leaf crisped and withered by the long drought dropping prematurely at my feet. The blue of the rainless sky, the heat and stillness of the parched earth filled the air with languor and dreaminess, scarcely a rustle disturbed the trees, the very shadows lay hot and still upon the yellowed grass, and the birds in their languid flight, paused in mid-air, or drooped their heavy wings and sat songless among the dwindled leaves. Suddenly in the midst of this silent heat, which quivered around me like viewless tongues of flame, I was conscious of a strange shiver and frightened wish to flee away. A moment more and a footfall came stealthily over the dried grass, rustling the crisped stalks like the hiss of a creeping snake, then the shadow of a man fell over me, and, starting from my sitting posture, I turned and saw the figure of Mr. Winterdale standing in the path.

He held out his hand to me, and tried to smile; but through the whole of my trembling frame I felt his dim, groping hatred, and I shrank up against a tree to protect myself. His hand dropped by his side.

"I am come to wish you good-by," he said.

I did not answer him. I would have crept into the huge tree if I could for safety, and, with my hand upon the rough bark, I wished it would open, and shut me from his sight.

"I think you will be very happy with my sister," he continued. "She is a good woman, and she *is* a woman, not a shadow impossible to grasp, which may be fiend or angel, one can never tell which."

I knew this was a stab at Miss Mildred,

and I tried to speak and defend her, but my trembling lips kept me silent.

"Have you neither a word of farewell nor of thanks?" asked Mr. Winterdale.

"No," said I, shortly.

"And why not, Miss Treganowen?"

"You do not like me, Mr. Winterdale." I shivered as I spoke. "I wish you would go away; you hurt me."

His eyes gleamed with a curious satisfaction as he listened to my words, and scanned my bending figure shrinking against the tree.

"Nervous as ever, I perceive," he said.

"Do you sleep well at nights now?"

I looked at him slightly astonished at this pretence of solicitude for my health, then I tried to pass up the walk and leave him.

"Stop!" he cried. "You owe me some thanks surely for prevailing on Miss Mildred to place you at Clifton? Still silent? Then perhaps you prefer school and old Miss Priscilla Polwhele to Hubert Spencer?"

Then I remembered that he was Dr. Spencer's uncle, and I came forward timidly and gave him my hand. He took it, and dropped it instantly.

"You are like your father," he said.

"And in your creeping, nervous ways you are like Mildred; that comes of living with her."

"Your nephew does not resemble you," I retaliated. "I should never guess you were relations."

"Hubert Spencer is like his mother, all sunshine and bright color, no dark spot in him. He is a sunny hill without a shade; I am a sombre valley, all shadow. And yet we agree; his mother puts us in unison."

"I am glad Mrs. Spencer is like her son," I answered.

A shade, a something, I scarcely know what, passed over Mr. Winterdale's face.

"You will not think my sister like Hubert; it is only I who see the mother in the son. Tell me," he added abruptly, "do you mean to go to Treval to wish that masked woman good-by?"

"Do not call Miss Mildred names to me," I said coldly; "she is my father's friend."

"Just as much as she is your mother's and mine," answered Mr. Winterdale slowly. "Miss Mildred has never deceived me. Tell her *that* from me when you see her, and add that I will rip open her secrets with her *own weapon*. I hold it in my hand now."

He grasped my shoulder hard as he spoke, and turned my face towards Treganowen.

"Do you see those towers, Esther? Well, never reckon on their being yours. Lucy Polwhele is not the *only* Polwhele, and you will never inherit them while another Polwhele lives, nor while Bernard Winterdale lives to proclaim the truth."

But here he stopped, checked either by

his own prudence or by my small deathly white face, which drooped against the rough tree, as sickened to faintness by this abrupt allusion to Paul Polwhele, I leant against it for support.

"Good-by, child," growled Mr. Winterdale, in a rough voice which perhaps hid some compunction. "You are a poor little weak creature, and a turn of the scales would overbalance your brain. There's only a hair's breadth between you and madness: that has always been my opinion, though Hubert Spencer thinks differently. I don't want to be the one to upset your wits altogether, though, as you truly divine, I am not fond of you. I play no part, you see—no one ever does with you—such organizations as yours, peeled to the quick, were never made to be deceived. Miss Mildred has not cheated *you*, has she?"

The blood rushed to my cheeks at this question, and my heart bounded with a loud painful stroke that made me gasp for breath.

"There—your face answers me," said Mr. Winterdale. "Miss Mildred will never pursue her sister's murderer, and you and I guess the *reason why*. Follow the secret to the end, Esther Treganowen, and I shall know it as soon as you, and then you shall help me to put my hand upon the *MURDERER*."

He strode away, never turning to look at me, while I sank down upon the scorched grass and sobbed aloud. Every nerve in my body thrilled with pain. To be intimidated, to be spoken to loudly, to have harsh words and threats rung in my ears, hurt me—oh! it hurt me with such sharp pain that it was crime to do it.

I lay on the grass, my face hidden on my arms, heedless of the fierce sun that glared down upon me from an uncovered roof of blue, while the air, sick with heat, pressed heavily on my aching head, and every leaf, threaded with the yellow drought as with some quivering pain, trembled in the dry light, and the only sound that broke the languid stillness, coming dimly to my ear at intervals, was the faint splash of a lazy wave as it crept up the beach, or retreated to the sea, shrinking from the hot touch of the bare rocks blistering in the sun.

Thus I lay weeping till the anguish of my rasped nerves was somewhat deadened, and I could bear to recollect Mr. Winterdale's words without feeling a sharp sensation of pain from head to foot.

His allusion to my weakness appalled me. This shrinking secretiveness, these mysterious clouds of thought dimming my brain, or the fervent visions that swept them away, were they, then, all warnings of insanity? My glowing imagination, my intense love of the beautiful, my passionate feelings and lonely fancies—all so many steps to the dreadful precipice which should dash me into madness? I thought of that blank time

spent at Treval, and its secret and darkness became terrible to me when threaded by a fear like this.

It was a cruel fear to put into a child's heart, yet Mr. Winterdale scarcely intended cruelty.

I did not know then that every bear thinks any other skin save bear's skin is some slight gossamer worthless for wear, which the first wind will crack and the first sunlight scorch. He only spoke according to his convictions—nothing more.

Perhaps his mention of Paul Polwhele gave me more real terror. If he knew this man lived, how could I be sure others were not aware of the fact also? And how long could I hope my father would be left in his tranquil ignorance of this ruffian's existence and crimes?

And when he heard of both, what then? Would he become the man's accuser, regardless of relationship? Would he dig up that buried history of jealousy and murder, and perhaps put his hand again upon Mildred, forgetful that his own father was not sinless?

Admiral Treganowen had a brother—Alicia and Mildred were sisters—he ought to be merciful. Oh! let the dead rest, my father! let the blood-stained past lie still!

Lately, by some new instinct born within me, I had begun to divine the passion and power of Mildred's early love for my father; and in the searchings and twinings of this fresh insight I somehow connected this love and Admiral Treganowen's crime with her woes.

"Mine shall never be the hand to hurt her," I said.

But by what miracle had the same suspicion entered Mr. Winterdale's mind that lay hidden, as I thought, from all ken in the recesses of mine?

I have said that slowly, through a long course of reading, of conversation, and of thought, I had come to believe in the *reality* of that figure on the roof. While they fought my impressions with the words "disease," "illusion," I was perplexed, but when Miss Admonitia confessed I had seen a *human being*, she tore down the wall between me and the truth, and my mind strode towards it with giant steps. While she on the one hand cried "Sarah Tregellas," and my father on the other cried "Delusion," I put my hand upon the truth and gripped it.

In the workings of my head upon my bed I grasped that terrible half-human, half-spirit face, and unveiled its secret.

*Miss Mildred held a prisoner at Treval.*

Buried in some recess of that old mansion she confined a living woman; there she hid that dead-white face of the blank wall; there she kept that groping figure of the roof, in some sure prison where no eyes had ever seen her save mine.

Was Miss Admonitia cognizant of this fact? did she consent to this woman's living death?

I answered myself with both yes and no. There was something inexplicable, contradictory in her words and manner, as I remembered them, which forbade my coming to a decision. At all events my mind rejected the idea of her being the active agent in this crime. Miss Mildred was the mainspring that moved all at Treval.

And who was this wretched prisoner, perishing in haggard solitude and gloom, whom she kept beneath her iron hand? I thought of that hand so white and small, and silken to the touch, and I shuddered as I answered. It was surely Alicia's murderer whom she held thus in the grasp of her terrible vengeance!

Read her letter over again, and see how every word of it justified the suspicion. Justified, do I say? Nay, told the fact in every assertion it made.

On the morning after I had received it from Dr. Spencer's hands I arose at sunrise, that with that clearest hour of all the twenty-four I might examine it, with every help my memory and the narrative of Prudence White could marshal to my aid. Then, amid all that still remained dark, this conviction came out clear, that Miss Mildred knew Paul Polwhele to be innocent, because beneath her own soft, cruel hand, in a prison of her own contriving, she held the real culprit.

I remembered, in my wild pursuit of that haggard, deathly figure, I had called out, "Stop! demon! thief! *murderess!*" And I recalled the sudden start, the rustle of amazed and sharp fear, and the rapid bound of this creeping woman as she heard my words.

In the blind agony of my terror I had touched the raw spot, I had probed the truth, and my epithets had doubtless pierced her writhing soul.

Reflecting that she might have called to me for help, had she so willed it, I could not avoid a doubt that this woman might be at Treval by her own consent. Perhaps the choice had been given her: this lonely room, this dungeon in the wall, this grave at Treval, or the chains and darkness of the common prison, and the scaffold in the glare of broad day; and she preferred this hideous life-long imprisonment, this haggard solitude, this living tomb, to death in open shame.

Any thing, any thing to save her wretched life!

Miss Mildred's motives, too. I fancied I could fathom. But they are too numerous for my pen to touch on; think of them for yourselves. Think of her blighted youth, its love, its anguish, its desolate uncomplaining grief, and say whether through the vista of these aching years we cannot see darkly enough to account for her acceptance of this terrible and loathsome office of jailer to her sister's murderess. Better keep the shedder of blood here always before her shrinking sight than tear up Alicia's name from its hal-

lowed grave, and perchance—for her death surely hid some great shame—give her fair honor to be torn into unholy shreds by idle tongues. Would a nature like Mildred's, which had already suffered so much to hide some dishonor, shrink from this additional suffering, which would be too secret for the subtlest rumor to guess at?

I thought not. She was not a woman for the sake, the vulgar sake, of hanging the culprit, to rip up her own and her sister's youth to the world, the story of their love, their hate, their jealousy, their cruel quarrels, and, lastly, the terrible accusations under which her own name had fallen in the dust beneath the cruel persecution received from her lover's hand.

In my secret heart I thanked Miss Mildred on my father's behalf she had not done this.

I knew not how the murderess had fallen into her hand, but through a long thread of gloomy thought I then unwound her reasons for preferring this secret vengeance of justice to the vengeance of an open court. Perhaps when the guilty woman came crouching to her feet, Alicia had long been dead, her very memory was buried in men's minds, my father was married, and had a little child born unto him, Miss Admonitia and herself were grown old, and their hot grief, their aching pain, were soothed by time. Why might they not pity the shrinking wretch, and say, "There, let us cover up this deed, which touches our family honor, and let us hide this woman and her sin till God takes her."

Thus I imagined Miss Mildred had reasoned, had acted, and I pitied her, I wept for her, and I *hated* her for what she had done. A daily loathing contact with crime, to this she had condemned herself for life! No wonder she fasted and prayed; no wonder her face wore such an unearthly whiteness; no wonder the ring of her voice was desolate as the cry of despair.

Nor was this all. Lurking in the dimmest recess of my mind lay the suspicion that this ghastly prisoner—scarcely human in her woe—might have been some friend, some servant, some pensioner of Miss Mildred's, who had *misinterpreted* her wish, and betrayed the unhappy Alicia, thinking she did her mistress good service. Then, when torturing years had gone by, she might have come, haggard with remorse, to fling herself at Mildred's feet and say—

"I did it—for you I did it. Save me!"

I never doubted that any man or woman might commit even murder for Miss Mildred's sake. The wondrous subduing power of her will, the subtle, strange fascination that conquered all natures brought within the circle of her mysterious influence, I had felt and seen.

And what if she had been consenting in the spirit to this ghastly deed? Not by any word, not by any look, not by any furtive

gesture, or veiled shadowy glance even, but merely by harboring in her hot aching heart the dreadful wish that her sister might die. Could she dare, with such guilt upon her soul, deliver up this fellow-woman to justice?

Generosity, pardon, pity—yes, even her own loathing of the creature—would speak like the voices of conscience demanding compassion for the wretch who had become an outcast, loathsome to the thought for *her*, because she had divined an evil thought of hers.

I had eaten at Mildred's table, and sat at her knee, and therefore this dim suspicion of *consent* was horrible to my heart; but there it crouched, ready to spring into life in a moment. Oh! what a fiery torture, what a burning anguish of retribution the daily sight of this *interpreter* must be to Miss Mildred!

I recalled her wild cry that God had punished the innocent for the guilty, her sudden fall to the floor in the crouching and terrible attitude of that haunting woman; I brought before me her fragile form, her white woe-stricken face, haggard with patient suffering, and I read the burning of her spirit, and the wail of its hopeless cry, in every pale line and hollow of her shadowy, shrinking figure. How could the flesh do aught but waste and quail before the quenchless flame of such an expiation as this?

Now I have given you at last the workings of my own mind respecting this mystery. Not that I at all times deemed the hidden prisoner the veritable murderess, the actual slayer of Alicia, but rather the betrayer and instrument who had compassed her death by other hands.

I turn to Mr. Winterdale. It appeared to me that through the cloud of his gloomy hate for Miss Mildred I saw his dreadful thought looming. He, too, had surely fathomed the mystery at Treval. He, too, suspected the presence of some concealed person, held a prisoner there; but for him this woman was Miss Mildred's *accomplice*. In his thought she was the true criminal, and this forlorn wretch only the hand that directed the weapon. Through her Miss Mildred might have paid the blood-money to the robbers, and to his mind it appeared nothing strange that she should keep her instrument safe in a sure prison, unseen by human eyes. I shuddered as I thought of all that might occur if Mr. Winterdale's dim suspicion—I could see it was but a suspicion—of the presence of some concealed person at Treval should grow into a certainty, and lead him into acts which would rend up our peace like an earthquake.

Looking back into his life, I could see some dogged suspicion of Miss Mildred had haunted all his lonely years at Treval, and rooted him there, in the fixed resolve to hunt her crime from her heart and from her hearth where she had hid it, and track her

down into the hands of justice. I could almost lay my finger on the time when this resolve had grown into rock in his spirit; it was when she so abruptly refused to marry the man for whose sake she had suffered so much. What was the motive that worked with such mighty power in her heart that it made her reject this happiness? Perhaps it was at this time that crouching, creeping horror, who bore the shape of a woman, had fallen into her silken hand, and she could not play two parts—she could not be wife and jailer.

I cannot tell you why I did not myself suspect Miss Mildred—save that the shadow of the crime may have touched her secret wish—of any participation in the foul murder of her sister, unless it be that I shrank from such a thought as we shrink from some hideous gulf into which we know we shall plunge if we look. There was something in my spirit which rejected all belief in her guilt. And I had faith in my instincts. Mine was one of those rare natures that seem to hang on the confines of the other world, ever hearing footfalls from the unknown, ever placing one hand within the veil that covers the soul, ever trembling on the verge of outer lore beyond human ken, ever searching out the hidden things of the spirit; and this strange nature rejected peremptorily all thought of Miss Mildred's guilt, though it never rejected the cold dislike which crept through every vein whenever I approached her.

My cheek has grown fevered, my hand trembling, as it has brought before you in these hurried sentences a picture of my mental state as Mr. Winterdale stole away through the gloomy trees, leaving me on the grass by the side of the arched well.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

HASTILY I turn to the other event of which I spoke as marking my last days at Treganowen—an event so little outwardly that it disturbed not a cobweb in the old house, nor stayed a single turn in the household wheel of duties that went grinding on. And yet upon this event my whole life was fastened, by this event my destiny was shaped, my love fixed, my heart healed of a great blow. It was a dream—only a dream; pass it over, unbelievers, and turn to a harder page in this history.

It is no marvel, some will say, that with such a teeming brain as mine I should dream strangely, especially now when Mr. Winterdale's words, my agitated thoughts, and my approaching departure all disturbed my mind. No, it was no marvel I should dream, but when my story is fully developed you will see the marvel is not in the

dream, but in the strange disease that brought the truth to me in my sleep, and deprived me of its memory on awaking.

In my dream I was again at Treval, seated in the cedar-tree, watching the sharp shadow in its dreary passage on the blank wall, straight up and straight down—no change in the attitude, no change in the pained look of its terrible face. White, white as snow on a grave, and woful as the grave itself, I saw it stop in its creeping, gliding travels and beckon to me.

"Help!" it said with its pale lips. "Succor me! You know me."

"I am going away," I answered, "and there is a great blank between you and me which has swallowed up my knowledge of you."

Then the face looked wistfully upon me, a terrible disappointment and grief in every line, and hiding its woe with thin pale hands; it faded away; but as the wall shut it up, I heard a voice falling on my ear like the murmur of water, and looking down from the cedar-tree I saw the figure of Thomas Flavel, the ghost-layer, standing at its foot.

"When next you go to Treval search in the red room!" he said, pointing solemnly with his hand, as he sank slowly, slowly into thin vapor, and vanished.

Here my dream ended, but I fancied myself awake, listening to the voice, and it was only when this had ceased that I sank down on my pillow and fell into a deep, dead sleep. When I awoke from this in the morning, like the king of old, the vision of the night had departed from me, but, unlike him, no dim recollection of its presence vexed my brain. I did not even know I had had a dream. Only that *lost* feeling—that searching, groping action of the mind which I have spoken of as tormenting me vaguely—was hot upon me to-day, tingling my veins with a restless fever, which sent me wandering from hour to hour, to and fro, through the lonely rooms at Treganowen. Moreover, the old sense of duality, the feeling of holding two distinct individualities, one of which constantly hid from me, evading my grasp like a shadow, when time upon time I thought my hand was upon it, haunted me like an impatient spirit fretting every nerve.

The lost look in my strange eyes this day carried a world of sorrow with it, before which I fled, and searching, searching, searching, I travelled up and down, and to and fro, through staircase, chambers, and corridor, restless and fevered.

Thus it chanced about noon, when the sun's rays played through my hair in a wavy band of fire, I entered Prudence White's room, the pretty blue cool chamber, that faced the west. She glanced at me with a scared look.

"What is the matter, Miss Esther?"



"I don't know, Prudence," said I wearily; "I am haunted, I believe."

Prudence sighed heavily. There was a world of superstition in her that only wanted a breath like this to fan it into life.

"It's a pity some good man can't lay Miss Lishy Tremaine at rest," she said. "Her spirit, or your thought of it, never lets you be. She wants you to do something for her, Miss Esther—what is it?"

"To find her murderer, Prudence; that's what I feel I have to do."

Prudence looked at me with amazed eyes, like one strangely startled by a sudden truth.

"If you feel that, Miss Esther," she said, "you'll do it. And no matter whether 'tis poor Miss Lishy Tremaine or your own thought that haunts you, you'll be tormented all the same till the task is done. But it's a wisht weird to be laid on one so young. What are you searching for, Miss Esther?"

For I had risen again, and was wandering away.

"I don't know, Prudence, but I wish some one would help me."

"Shall I send round to Trevalla Churchtown for Dr. Spencer, Miss Esther?"

As she spoke a low sob from a distant corner of the room startled me, and turning round I saw Jenifer curled up on the memorable many-caped coat fast asleep. Her flushed face, her swollen eyes, and subsiding sobs told me she had fallen into slumber after a violent fit of crying. Amazed, I looked to Prudence for an explanation.

"Well, Miss Esther, the fact is Jenifer and I have had a quarrel."

Prudence seemed unwilling to say more, but I pressed her so hard that she yielded.

"Where are your keys, Miss Esther?"

"In my pocket, Prudence, I suppose."

"No, Miss Esther, they are in mine. There, take them, and look after them better, miss. For I quarrelled with Jenifer because I found her—the great gawk!—spoiling the lock of your desk, trying with every key on the bunch, except the right one, to open it."

"Trying to open my desk, Prudence?"

"Iss, fye, miss, she were. She said she only wanted a bit of white paper to put round your candle, and she was sure you wouldn't be angry, but when I threatened to turn her right out of the house, and tell you the reason why afterwards, she cried like a child, and then I gave in."

"Poor Jenifer!" said I. "Doubtless that was the truth. She can't read writing, and I have nothing in my desk but letters from India; she could not want them."

"Have you no money or trinket, miss?"

"Oh, Prudence, don't say such cruel things!" I exclaimed.

"Why, I don't know, Miss Esther, about that. I have not forgot your ma's bracelet. I know she lost it for all her denial, for Dominy Chitty confessed as much to me.

And Jenifer is a new maid; I only took her four years ago when old Tamson died."

"Hush! she'll hear you."

"No, she's sleeping as hard as if she'd been trapesing the house all night, instead of lying in her bed. Besides, she's bedoled with crying, and I gave her a cup of elder tea when I seed'd the shape she was in with yewling; so she wont wake up this pure spell. Do 'ee go and look in your desk, Miss Esther, just to satisfy me like."

"But you say Jenifer didn't open it."

"Never mind, do look, Miss Esther; do 'ee now, co!"

No Cornish person resists that little word "co." What it means or whence it comes I cannot tell. I am inclined to revere it as the last living word of the great Trojan or Phœnician tongues, or, maybe, as the diminutive of *Corinæus*, our mighty founder, whose name, perchance, got to be used as a spell or watchword among the Cornish, till at last, its great potency being acknowledged by "One and All," pleaders, beggars, and coaxers have learned to come down upon us with the irresistible monosyllable, and conquer.

Learned men, in arguments quite conclusive to themselves, have traced words back to less satisfactory sources; and at all events, leaving the origin of "co" still in doubt, it vanquished as it always does, and, no longer resisting Prudence's wish, I went to my own room, jingling my keys, half vexed with her, and sorry for poor Jenifer.

On opening my desk, however, I started; it was all in disorder, and a sheet of letter-paper lay on it spread open. I turned it over, and there, in a firm hand not unlike my own, save that I wrote like a child, and this was a free womanly hand, I read these words:

*"When I go to Treval I must search the red room."*

A faint sickness seized me by my heart as I read, for the words, like a flash of lightning, illumined my closed brain, and—I can't say I remembered—no—I *saw* my dream and *heard* it. The deep sleep also into which I sank afterwards I recollected, but I could in no way account for the writing.

After many minutes of alarm and subsequent thought I decided, as the shy secretiveness of my nature prompted, to say nothing to Prudence or my father, either respecting my dream or this strange paper in my desk. I shrank from the coil of surmises it would wrap about me, and I shrank also from flinging any new excitement into my father's mind, darkened as it already was by superstitious fancies regarding Alicia. As for myself, after the first shock the mystery ceased to terrify me; it only stirred me to a more fevered impa-

The motto of the Cornish arms.

tience and fiercer longing for that search at Treval on which all the energies of my mind were bent. I resolved on making an effort to get beneath Miss Mildred's roof at once.

If my purpose was unchildish or evil, I was not aware of it. I did not wish to search out that sad, shadowy woman's terrible secret in order to work her harm, but only because this gnawing desire at my heart to grapple with the mystery was fretting my brain like a fire.

Like a hunter tracking down his prey, unconscious of his cruelty, feeling only the glow of pursuit, so did I self-deceptively pen these few lines:

"MY DEAR MISS MILDRED—I should like to wish you good-by before I go to Clifton. Please let me come to Treval for two or three days. I have seen Mr. Winterdale; he was not kind. He gave me a message for you. Yours affectionately,

"ESTHER MILDRED TREGANOWEN."

It is with shame I tell of the letter, and acknowledge the thought with which I folded it up.

"If she is afraid of Mr. Winterdale," said I, and it seems she is—else why had he power to change her determination respecting me?—she will let me come to Treval."

I was mistaken. By the same messenger who took my letter I had a reply from Miss Admonitia.

Treval was full of painters and masons; there was no room in which I could sleep. If I would ride on horseback the next day to Trevalla Cross, she and Miss Mildred would meet me in the carriage, and say farewell.

Disappointed and musing, I determined to go.

I briefly told Prudence there was nothing missing from my desk. Then in the evening I spoke to Jenifer carelessly, confessing all Mrs. White had said. I was fully prepared for a burst of passion or a heavy fire of abuse against the housekeeper, but, to my surprise, Jenifer only rubbed her impertinent little nose and cried again.

"I know I was wrong, miss," she said, "but I only wanted a bit of white paper out of your desk."

"Why did you not ask me, Jenifer?"

Jenifer was silent, save for a loud sob, which went to my heart.

"Jenifer, you cannot write, can you?"

"No, miss."

"You have not left my keys about, so that any one could open my desk and— and play me any trick?"

"No one ever touched your keys but me—oh, Miss Esther, I'm so afraid of yer to-night!" cried Jenifer, interrupting herself in a scared voice.

"That comes of doing wrong," said I, in

a highly didactic tone. "You were never afraid of me before you stole my keys."

"Miss Esther," said Jenifer, looking at me with a white face, "why didn't the doctor come to-day?—of all days in the year, why didn't he come to-day?"

"He had business, elsewhere, Jenifer, I suppose," I answered, laughing. "Do you want to make a father confessor of him, and whisper your sins in his ear?"

"I should feel like a hundred pound weight off my back if I could," said Jenifer.

I dismissed her gayly, but, left alone, I thought of that strange written sentence in my desk in a curious awed way.

My dream did not affect me so much; I read in it only a repetition of my waking thoughts, and there was nothing very singular in my sleeping brain mingling the figure of old Thomas Flavel with a vision of that sad face at Treval. Again I debated whether I would show the paper to any one or not, but turning the subject on every side in my mind, I saw this must necessarily lead to a recital of my dream, and that would so completely betray my peculiar phase of feeling and dreadful suspicion, that it might defeat my determined purpose by arousing Mildred's vigilance; for I felt sure if my father read my ghastly thought, his horror and amazement would be too great to permit him to be silent. Why should I disturb his tranquillity? The time was not yet ripe for making him a sharer in the hideous suspicion that had groped through every avenue in my mind till it reached the centre, and sat there, a firm conviction, directing every concentrated purpose of my heart. I resolved on silence till ripeness was come, and I could show him facts, not fancies.

I might have spoken to Dr. Spencer, but he was Mr. Winterdale's nephew, and this consideration held me back. With that clear instinct which, like a magnetic current, rushed to the true pole of his feelings and purpose, I divined that Mr. Winterdale would make an instrument of me if he could to drag forth Miss Mildred's secret, and setting myself in array against him, I resolved I would never be a tool of his.

"Dr. Spencer would tell him," I said. And a feeling of bitter disappointment and pain came over me, like that felt by a traveller who sees a great gulf opened where he had hoped to find a bridge.

I slept at last, and my sleep was dreamless.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

To my surprise, Dr. Spencer came early the next morning, and volunteered to ride with me to Trevalla Cross. My father seemed glad that I had of my own accord written to Miss Mildred, and asked for a farewell word.

"I should be so grateful if you could really like her, Esther," he said at breakfast. "It would be a comfort to me to give her your love. I blighted her whole life. I brought an ill name upon her. I doubt if she ever had an offer of marriage after that terrible event in her family."

The idea of Miss Mildred's marrying struck me as a strange impossibility, and even my father's speaking of it jarred against my nerves. I saw he could never have understood her—never have realized the strength of her attachment to himself.

Dr. Spencer and I had not long to wait at the ancient cross of Trevala before we saw the old lumbering carriage which belonged to the sisters making its way heavily up the road.

I bent forward eagerly on my horse to catch the first glimpse of Miss Mildred. It was now the end of September, and I had not seen her since November. True, there was the blank time passed at Treval, but I could not bring her face across that chasm; it was only visible to my senses as I had known it before my illness, nearly a year ago. And it was with no childish, uncomprehending eyes I was to gaze at her now. The shrinking dread of my infancy had shaped itself into a reasonable fear, and the blind repugnance had grown to a wakeful pity. I was to look now on her face believing I knew her secret, and could read her terrible penance in every pallid line. I could imagine all the anguish of her remorse, and the exaggerated feeling of fellow-guilt which crushed her day by day, as—even in her utmost pain dealing gently with the wretched prisoner at Treval—she held her securely, bearing her dreadful presence and pouring out her burden only to God.

Thus thinking, I looked upon Miss Mildred's delicate face leaning against the crimson cushions—that face whitened even to deathliness by the contrast, and I met the gaze of her dark eyes with a start.

Why do people seem changed to us if we have not seen them for never so short a time? Why does it take hours, perhaps days, to bring back the old familiar look to the face, the familiar touch to the hand?

Miss Mildred was changed. There was some spirit gone out of her which used to shine forth from her deep eyes in the old days when she looked at me. Time was when, if I had shrunk from her, she too had been repelled by me. That she should repel—the jailer—was no marvel, but that a child could inspire aversion was strange. Well, this silent, slow hatred was gone; it was interest, affection, that flushed her pale beautiful face as she leaned forward, and there was a restless eagerness in her way of welcoming me which formed a marked contrast to the old calm manner, so cold and

repellent, which had so often chilled my young veins.

I feared at first that Dr. Spencer's presence would hinder all free speech between us, but she alighted from the carriage and walked up the road by the side of my horse, while the doctor, standing with his bridle flung over his arm, remained with Miss Admonitia.

"You have something to tell me, Esther," said Mildred, in her soft sad voice.

How curiously that old silvery tone thrilled over me, bringing back in a rush of memory all my childhood—my last morning at Treval—my visit to her room—my terror on the roof—and all the links that brought me here face to face with her, I more a sealed book to her than she to me!

There was an indescribable pathos and anguish in her voice that forced me, in spite of the shudder that ran through me, to answer kindly.

"Her enemy shall not find her through me," I thought.

"Mr. Winterdale," said I, "met me yesterday in the grounds at Treganowen; he bade me tell you that you had never deceived him, and he would rip open the truth with your own weapon."

The thin white hand resting on the pommel of my saddle grasped it nervously, but this was the only sign of emotion Mildred gave.

"He hates me," she said. "Was he not cruel enough the other day? What need to send such a message by the lips of a child—a child I love? You do not believe any thing against me, do you, Esther?"

I was silent.

"I know," she said—and the old desolate tone rang mournfully through her voice; "I know Prudence White has told you the history your father shrank from uttering, but I cannot think she said any thing unkindly of me."

"She never has," I answered.

"Then is it Mr. Winterdale's foul accusations you heed? He hates me—he has always hated me. He has never ceased to suspect me of the most hideous crimes. For him it was I who procured my sister's abduction, and kept her a prisoner among bandits; for him it was my hand poniarded the poor corpse brought to the north porch. Esther, I am growing weary of my life. Your father, and now you too—must I give so much love, and receive only hate? Bid Mr. Winterdale do his worst—what can it matter to me? Stop! I will tell his nephew myself."

She spoke hurriedly, a bright flush burning on her cheek, and turning, she beckoned to Dr. Spencer, who came towards us at once.

"Dr. Spencer," she said, "I speak to you

because, as Mr. Winterdale's nephew, I presume you know something of his mind, and also because, as his nephew, you cannot but be interested in the matter at issue between us, which touches the honor of two ancient families in no way connected with either of you. Being without his early prejudices, you will be impartial; you will see the cruelty of disturbing the peace of two houses for a chimera—you will see the selfishness; shame and dishonor poured on the head of a Tremaine or a Treganowen would leave a Spencer and a Winterdale unscathed. Oh! if such a stain came near his own blood I might hope for mercy! But do not think I am pleading with you! No! Tell him from me to do his worst, but tell him also he will defeat his own purpose; he will ruin Colonel Treganowen's happiness without finding what he seeks. The sole good that will result from his revenge will be my death. Cannot he wait for that a little while? Great heavens! have not I waited for revenge?"

She paused, clasping her thin hands together tightly, while the sad music of her voice lingered in the ear like an echo from a cave.

The embarrassment and pain that agitated Dr. Spencer's face astonished me. He had not time to rally and reply to her ere she spoke again.

"I find Esther changed towards me," she said, laying her little hand on mine, and then instantly removing it with a touching pathos and knowledge of my dislike that brought a pang to my heart; "and I have to thank your uncle for this. He sends me a message, too—a threatening message—by this child's lips. Well, tell him I am weary of my life; he will know what that means."

"Believe me, Miss Mildred," said Dr. Spencer, with quivering lips, "I know nothing of any message sent through Esther. You must forgive my uncle; what he feels regarding your poor murdered sister has become a monomania. I am myself obliged to humor him, and he often sets me tasks, or wrings from me promises which I find it hard, and, indeed, in some cases impossible, to keep." (Here certainly the doctor's glance fell on me.) "I will tell him what you say, but I beg of you, Miss Mildred, not to notice his madness."

Miss Mildred smiled mournfully.

"It is easy to bear with him while he only treats me rudely or with hatred," she said, "but I tell you the weary truth when I say any attempt on his part to bring my unhappy sister's story again before the world would kill me."

"He cannot mean it; he does not intend so useless a cruelty," cried Dr. Spencer.

"What else does his threat signify?" asked Miss Mildred. "I do not ask his mercy," she continued, as she shuddered visibly, "for myself, but for my sister Alicia. If she

could speak to him she would say, 'Let me rest, let the grave hide me, let death pitifully cover my sorrows and my secret.' It is a rash hand that would disturb the dead, Dr. Spencer, and a cruel hand that would unveil the festering pain in the hearts of two lonely sisters.

In talking we had walked back towards the carriage, and as we came within the servants' hearing we all sank into silence. Nevertheless, Miss Admonitia's quick eye caught the deeper shadow on Mildred's face. She put out her hand and touched her. There was a world of love, of desolate love, in the action; it told how these two had stood together against fate, and time, and calumny, and in the unnatural stillness of their lives, empty of all joy, dry and barren as the wilderness, they had yet kept their souls as a watered garden in which to nurture that one holy plant, sisterly love.

Quick to sympathize as a musical chord, quick to see as a ray of light, Dr. Spencer divined my thoughts, and turned a pitying glance on the two lonely women whose cold, proud faces seemed so defiant of the world, so undesirous of mercy.

With a gentle hand he placed Miss Mildred in the carriage, the aid he gave having a tenderness in its touch that came from the heart. The unaccustomed kindness covered her like a shower of warm light from Pity's wing. Distrust, veiled hatred, and suspicion, these had been her atmosphere so long that this unwonted glow disturbed her spirit; she looked up wonderingly, scanning our faces with a desolate look of pain—a pain that told of such long years of hate and anguish that tears gathered in my eyes as I met it. To my surprise, answering tears came to hers, and a softer sorrow than I had ever seen yet shadowed her pale face. Miss Admonitia gazed at her amazed, and would have spoken, but she put up her hand to stop her.

"Admonitia, Mr. Winterdale threatens me, and perhaps I shall have again to pass through the anguish and shame I bore five-and-twenty years ago."

"It is impossible!" cried her sister, with flashing eyes.

"Nothing is impossible to a blind love and a blind hate like Mr. Winterdale's," said Mildred, "fiercer as both are for being smothered so long. But, Dr. Spencer, you are surely my friend and Esther's—"

She stopped suddenly, gazing at me with the strangest look; then in a low, concentrated voice, she burst out—

"Oh! stop him!—stop him, Dr. Spencer! I feel 'tis you alone who have the power to stay his hand. Believe me, he does not know what he is doing. Alicia! oh, my poor sister, will they never let you rest? Shall the sorrow of twenty-five years avail us nothing?"

Her brow contracted as with a spasm of

pain, and, shuddering, she covered her face with her hands.

"The honor of our family—" began Admonitia, with trembling lips; but she turned sharply from her quailing tone, and gathered herself up in full pride. "Who or what is Mr. Winterdale that he should presume to meddle with our affairs?"

Dr. Spencer made no reply to this; he laid his hand with gentle kindness on Mildred's.

"Rely on me," he said, in a firm tone. "I promise you my uncle shall not disturb your peace. He can do nothing without me."

Dr. Spencer glanced at me as he spoke with a look which I could not understand, but which I long remembered.

"This dreadful story was laid at rest long ago in your sister's grave," he continued, in a tone of deep commiseration, "and it would be cruel in a stranger to drag it forth again. *Nothing* could justify such conduct, except the discovery of the murderer, and bringing him to justice."

I felt myself turn deadly pale, and, in spite of all my efforts to resist the attraction, my eyes fixed themselves on Miss Mildred's face. Her features wore the hue of marble, and a haggardness and a horror gleaned through them which she strove vainly to cover with her small white hand. Still, she spoke instantly, and her clear, sad tones shook with but a slight tremor.

"After so many years, Dr. Spencer, there is slight hope of that. God's justice has doubtless long overtaken the slayer of that innocent girl."

As if by common consent, no one replied, and a momentary silence fell over us, during which I felt Dr. Spencer's gaze resting on me anxiously.

"Esther is pale and tired," he said. "Had we not better say good-by?"

"Yes, I think so, for Mildred's sake as well," answered Miss Admonitia, whose proud face had seemed to utter a silent protest throughout against the whole conversation.

Trembling slightly, I brought my horse to the carriage door, and gave my hand to the sisters. Both rose, and, as I stooped forward, kissed me.

I could scarcely bear this kiss: something either in myself or in them made me recoil from it. I felt as if the atmosphere of a dungeon were in its touch, the clank of a chain in its sound. Either they or I was treacherous.

"Why do they lie?" I thought passionately, "and how dare they keep that fearful woman beneath their roof?"

"You will be very happy with Mrs. Spencer, Esther; and, I hope, stronger. You must write often."

I did not hear what Miss Admonitia was saying; the doctor answered for me—

"Yes, I promise Esther shall write often. I have no anxiety for her health; I anticipate the happiest results from giving her so merry a companion as Miss Weston."

Miss Admonitia smiled kindly.

"I shall be glad for Esther to like her," she said.

I looked up, and caught Miss Mildred's gaze fixed earnestly on me. There was a gleam in her eyes that shot a cold fear into my heart.

"Surely she is a revengeful woman," I thought.

"This companion, Esther," she said, "will only be a cold stranger to you. You do not care for her, I see."

"I answered faintly, 'No,' and turned my horse wildly into the hedge.

Dr. Spencer beckoned to the servants, who during our conversation had stood at a distance—the coachmen at the horses' heads—they mounted the box, and in a moment the carriage was gone.

I looked after it with a hard, unchildish gaze. I felt as though I could crush those two women with a word. The fascination of her presence gone, my compassion for Mildred died away. Her white hand waving from the carriage window shone red as blood against the sunny sky. For a few awful moments I believed her guilty, and during that little space of time I felt a greater horror and hatred for them both than had ever yet steeped my soul in bitterness. Pressing my lips close together, I thought how hard it was that all childhood, all innocent, quiet thought should be wrung out of my heart by my knowledge of their cruel secret. What had their cold guardianship of my simple years forced upon me? Premature reflection, isolation, disease, terror; and these had destroyed my infancy, stroke upon stroke, till childhood died, and a withered woman rose in its place, unnatural, stunted, sickly in mind and body.

O Love! where thou art not there is a wilderness, and in this wilderness I had lived, and grown to this distorted shape.

Cursed was that day when my child-heart sank down into silence beneath the cold roof of Treval. Admonitia might soften to me now, Mildred might even love me—what then? Would that do away with the hate that had crushed my infancy? My nature was formed now; habit is as a strong chain, binding us firmly to old custom. I could not unlock my closed spirit with speech; it held its secrets hotly, fiercely, in the clutch of a grim silence, that like an iron door, shut me up in solitude, barring out my friends.

"Esther," said the clear voice of Dr. Spencer, startling my ear by a cadence of music that struck straight on the sick chord—"Esther, my foolish uncle has built up a wall, a prison grating between you and me, and you will not so much as put one of your fingers between the bars. My poor child, I

will not ask you now. Time will bring confidence. I must be your friend, or I wield the healing wand in vain. No matter, Esther, whose hands built up the wall around you, I will tear it down yet, and set you free. Let philosophers preach as they may, silence is disease, speech is health. The babbling brook that runs on whispering to the leaves and shadows, is limpid and full of life; fish, bird, insect rejoice in it, childhood plays with it, youth murmurs love by it, and old age grows warm again in its sheen.

"The silent, solitary pool, Esther, lies stagnant; all life shuns it, save the ill life of weed or reptile. No laughter of children, no talk of youth and maiden ever make it glad, no stray foot lingers near it lovingly; hated alike in the sunshine or the shade, it withers, it dwindles, it dries up, it dies, never having given or received a blessing.

"My poor child, my birdie, my little foundling—for when have you had a mother or a home?—let me save you from this fate."

He took my hand, and bent towards me, the light from his deep eyes—clear fountains of truth and goodness—warming my heart with a glow of comfort so dear, that grateful tears swelled up and rained over my cheeks in drops that fell down upon his clasped fingers holding mine. Then when I saw those tears—I who never dreamed before of showing tears to human eyes—a sudden shyness filled my whole being, and instead of unlocking my speech, this soft kindness, this tender tone of his, shut it in with a firmer key. Ten thousand bolts about me could not have made me quieter than this hot flush of shyness did. It was more silent than the hushed solitude, the cold loneliness, the fevered terror of Treal. But it had this difference, that my silence there was ice, and here it seemed a fire. And I, glowing, quivering, blushing in its flame, fled before it, half in laughter, snatching my hand away, and galloping close to the honeysuckled hedges, shyly bending to the music of my horse's feet.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

I DEVOTED the few following days to many a word of farewell to the cottagers and servants, and then, with a sort of superstitious tenderness, I visited my favorite haunts in the garden. Lastly, I stood by the old ash-root where I had fallen asleep on that memorable day in my life whence I dated so many new thoughts and feelings. I approached the tree with a deep blush and trembling of my whole frame, and even when quite near I was still afraid to touch it. I put out my hand and drew it back with a start, turning to see if any one were

near to observe me. And it was only after many such an attempt that the tips of my fingers ventured to rest lightly for a moment on the bark. Then I turned and fled, stopping with affected carelessness by a hazel-bush, whose nuts, ripe and falling, dropped lazily in the wind's lap. Seeing no one I came back, and with a fluttering heart measured my height against the notch in the bark which represented the stature of Alice. I was far below it still, and the painful hot flush that stained my cheeks brought tears to my eyes as I marked the distance.

A bed of violets grew round the root of this old tree, and kneeling amongst their leaves, flowerless now, I took up a plant which I carefully placed in a little pot to carry to Clifton with me.

Yet, somehow, on my journey, when I saw Dr. Spencer carefully minding the little flower, always finding a secure corner for it in the chaise, and never forgetting to water it or carry it within doors when we stopped at inns for the night, my heart smote me with a pang like conscious treachery, and I tried many times to take the sole charge of the plant myself. Playfully preventing all care on my part, the doctor would make a merry answer, assuring me the precious Treganowen violet was safe, or the handful of Cornish soil was unspilt by sacrilegious hands. I bore this with blushes, and an irritated, pained patience that fretted me.

Our journey was without incident, though its tediousness would make this generation smile. We posted the whole way, stopping at night at the town on our road. We were to go to Bath first, and spend a few days with my mother, and as we neared this place a slow fever burned through my veins, though I held my peace and hid it bravely. It was night when we arrived, and I felt my breath come and go quickly as we descended from the chaise.

There was no welcome at the door, no welcome in the hall, and as the servant ushered us into the drawing-room, I saw there was no welcome there either. The large room was dark, cold, and tenantless.

"Mrs. Treganowen is gone to a ball at the rooms," said the servant, as he stirred the fire, and sent a heavy puff of smoke into our faces. Then, after lighting the candles he left us, while my father and I looked chilly at each other across the whole length of the handsome, melancholy apartment. Dr. Spencer was not with us; we had left him at his hotel.

"My dear," said my father, a slight tremulousness in his voice, "would you like anything before you go to bed? I shall sit up for your mother."

I saw he desired it, so I rose and kissed him, wishing him good-night with a pitiful tenderness I vainly strove to hide. Tear-blinded I found myself on the staircase, not

knowing whither to turn; but in a moment a sharp, thin, foreign voice accosted me.

"Can I make you to see your room, Miss Esther?"

"If you please, Dominica."

Up another flight of stairs, then another, and through a narrow passage into a dingy, ill-shaped room, furnished poorly with painted deal; no curtains at the window, none at the small bed. I took this all in with a glance as Dominica set a chair for me.

"Madame told us mees would be here only one two days, so it was no good to derange nobody, and she said dis room would do."

I made her no answer. Proudly silent, I resolved at all events not to betray my feelings to a person I disliked.

"I go to send Jenifer to the signorina," said Dominica, looking round the room with a sinister smile, and then departing.

The moment she was gone I flung myself on my knees, with my head resting on the rush-bottomed chair, and tried to repress my tears. At Treganowen I had fancied I did not care whether my mother loved me or not, but now I was near her, her bare, cold dislike sent a quiver of pain through my flesh.

I was disturbed in my sad thoughts by the voice of Jenifer, pitched in that tone which showed that her impertinent nose was fast leading her into a quarrel.

"Ef you plase, young man, I should be glad to be tould," said Jenifer, "ef this gashly ould house es tha Tower of Babil, or a shaaft turned oopside down?"

The person she addressed, who by a certain thumping and clattering on the stairs, was evidently assisting her to carry my trunk, responded in the Somerset dialect, but my unaccustomed ears failed to comprehend a word of his broad Saxon answer.

"Aw, iss sure, et's tha Tower of Babil," continued Jenifer; "and thic be waun of they 'confused tongues' the Scripture tells of. Ef you kickey, young man, like a coult larning grammar, you caent expect to be onderstood by a Christian."

"I zem it ez zummüt of zorambul to git hup yur, as yur zay," bawled the man, stuttering at every word, and elevating a coarse voice to its utmost pitch in order to insure being understood, but vainly, for Jenifer, now at the door, shook her head at him, and pointed to the stairs.

"I warn't brought oop in tha Tower of Babil," she said. "I caent understand furrin gibberish of no kinds."

"Anan?" said the man helplessly.

"A Nan?" repeated Jenifer. "There's no Nan here, chucklehead, and you haven't got no caall, as I see, to caall me out of my name."

"Anan?" said the man, again.

"You can go down-stairs, my son, ef you will," said Jenifer, trying not to be exasperated;

<sup>1</sup> Stammer.

rated; "maybe Nan es en the kitchen expectin' of 'ee."

"Anan?" exclaimed the bewildered Saxon, scratching his head, and looking with a vacant and witless stare at Jenifer.

It was too much for her temper. She set down the box and dashed at him, rumpling his shock head of red hair with both hands, and pouring into his astonished ears a tirade of choicest Cornish.

"Thee big timnoodle? thee hulking luttar-pouch! I'll knaok the great dunderhead through the planchen, I will! Sich impurance I never seed in all my born days, not I! Faith and shoar, I'll get thic bufflehead of thine en ooose fur a mop, which es aal et's fit for. I'll fix 'un en a shaape as Nan shall know 'un again. A Nan indeed! I'll teach 'ee! Now, gawkum, what arree standing there for, goggling' for gapes like a oogly Glassenbury dog?"

The astonished Saxon wrenched his red mop from Jenifer's hands, and relieved himself of a few of the strongest words in his strong dialect; but when he followed this up by a blow—having certainly received provocation—I grew frightened, and screamed loudly for help. Jenifer meanwhile defended herself by a chair, which she caught up in haste, presenting the four legs at the man's countenance whenever he approached too near.

Dominica was the first whom the noise brought to our aid, but she was quickly followed by the other servants, and by my father. The cries, vituperation, and anger were indescribable till he came. Then Jenifer dashed down the chair, and sprang forward. Words fell from her lips like a torrent.

"I arn't come aal tha way from Cornwall to be put upon by furriners, to be beat and swore at en a langwidge the screech-owls throwed away as too bad for themselves; and I arn't a crow to sleep in a chimley-top, in a croom of a room that a mouse couldn't stand on his hind-legs en. No; and what's more, I'll spaak oop for Miss Esther while there's breath in my body, I well; and I say this es no chamber to put an aunly daughter onto; et's a sin and a shame, et es. I'll be bound Crummell's dog, standing there like a snake en flounces, have goet a room fit for a lady; but my young missus—she es es the aunly child her father have goet—may be pitched anywhere, like halvans' thravwed upon a moor. A bed as a hound wouldn't shaake hisself in es good enough for her, but ef Crummell's dog esn't sleeping in silk and satin, I'll be cut up in lerrups,<sup>1</sup> and be peppered and salted, and put en a pie, and what's more, I'll eat et myself, I well. And where's Miss Alice, who was prink out like a butterfly in boots the laest time I was here? And wisht I was then,

<sup>1</sup> Looking like a fool.

<sup>2</sup> Refuse from a mine.

<sup>3</sup> Small Pieces.

and wisht I am now; but I won't be put upon. And where's her room, that was next Miss Esther's own mamma's? Caen't her an child have et, I wonder, or es tha oogliest auld garret in this gashly Tower of Babil good enough for your master's child, you imperent Sarasins?"

Jenifer stopped for sheer want of breath, and then I turned and looked at my father. He was deadly pale. Indignant passion quivered on his lip, and flashed in his eyes, and thundered forth in his voice. The servants shrank away before him as he strode forward and confronted Dominica Cetti, whose evil eyes quailed as the full fire of his wrath fell upon her.

"How dare you put Miss Treganowen in a garret which the meanest of my servants would not occupy?" he demanded, in a tone that rang out through the house like a trumpet.

The woman writhed and cowered, and tried to creep away, like a reptile crawling out of sight, but Jenifer stopped her.

"Begging your pardon, Dominy Chitty, but Crummell's dog caen't be let slink onto a gutter-hole just yet."

Meanwhile, my father waited for an answer with a countenance so stern that the woman saw there was no escape. She turned at bay.

"I had the orders of my mistress for what I did," she said.

Then, folding her arms, she glanced triumphantly at my father. He grew still more pale, but, though some new emotion shadowed his face, his anger did not abate.

"Take Miss Treganowen's luggage into Miss Weston's room," he said to the servants.

"My mistress will be very great angry," muttered Dominica, following us furtively as we descended the stairs, my father and I hand-in-hand.

The neat, pretty room to which the housemaid conducted us drew from my lips a cry of pleasure.

"This is your room, Esther," said my father. "I had no idea of your being placed in any other. When you were last here you shared it with—with Miss Weston, my ward, who will be your companion at Mr. Spencer's, and whom I am sure you will love very much."

This was the first time my father had mentioned to me this unknown Alice, and I was struck by something constrained and strange in his tone.

"I'm wisht to worrit you again, sir," said Jenifer, "but I must have a room close to Miss Esther's. I promised the doctor I'd kip by her alwis, and I caen't do that ef I'm put to sleep oop a ladder among the chimley-tops."

My father opened a door leading out of my chamber into a small room.

"This must be your room, Jenifer."

"Excuse me, sir, that is my room," said the Spanish woman in a quick, sharp tone.

"Then remove your things and take another," answered my father.

The woman seemed to grow beside herself with rage at this order, but he did not appear to observe her passion.

"Jenifer, you had better assist her," he said.

But Jenifer had scarcely taken a step towards the door before Dominica sprang on her like a snake, and, writhing round her, clasped her in both arms.

"No one shall enter my room!" she shrieked. "Listen," she said to my father, in a hissing tone. "Persist in giving this miserable my chamber and you'll repent it all your life long."

At this moment I saw in the toilet-glass, which was exactly opposite the open door leading into Dominica's room, the shadow of a man. I was standing by the dressing-table, and therefore able to fix my eyes earnestly on the mirror, and in another instant his face came distinctly into the glass, and I saw it was the face of Paul Polwhele.

Nervous, excited, wearied with my long journey, I could not control my terror. I shrieked aloud, and shrank to the floor, covering my eyes with my hand.

Jenifer sprang to my help, while my father pulled at the bell furiously.

"Go and bid my wife come home instantly!" he cried to the frightened servants. "Take the carriage, and bring Dr. Spencer with you to see my daughter. Poor child!" he continued, bending over me, "I cannot wonder you are ill. Worn out and weary, you needed quiet and a kind welcome—not a painful scene like this."

He lifted me in his arms and placed me on the bed, but my horror of Paul was so great that I was seized with a fit of trembling, while every sound in the house increased my nervous excitement, bringing on convulsive starts and sharp cries of fear completely beyond my control.

"Send for mamma! is she never coming?" I exclaimed, wildly.

It seemed an age till I heard the carriage roll to the door, and every moment was a long hour, as my mother slowly mounted the stairs, lingering at every step. My father left the room as she entered, whispering to me that he would but speak to the doctor, and come again.

My mother stopped at the door to ask for her fan; then she removed her cloak, her hood, her gloves; but she came to my bedside at last, and looked down coldly on my pale features, my wild eyes, my convulsed frame, her own beautiful flushed face, her exquisite figure, her rich attire, all forming a perfect contrast with my weird, witch-like looks. With eager hands I clutched her by her soft lace dress, but a spasm running through my nerves at that moment, my



stiffened fingers refused their hold, and fell down clenched upon the pillow.

"The child is possessed," said my mother. "I hate fits—they are horrid. It is just like Colonel Treganowen, to drag me away from a place where I was enjoying myself, and bring me here, where I can be of no earthly good, and only get frightened to death. Send for a good strong woman to hold her. What folly to send for me! I wish I hadn't come!"

She turned to go, but I sprang up wildly.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, stop!—I have something to tell you! Send them all away, and let me tell you, or I shall die!"

My mother looked back on me, and stood irresolute. I saw no fear for me would bring her again to my bedside. I must touch herself, or every chord within her would remain dumb to my cry.

"Mamma, I want to tell you about your bracelet—the one you lost."

"The poor child is roadling," said Jenifer, preparing to leave the room at a sign from my mother, who had now seated herself by my pillow.

"Oh, Jenifer!" I shrieked, clasping my hands together, "not in there, not through Dominica's room! go out at the other door."

"She's dawning, sure enough," whispered Jenifer pitifully, as she humored my wish, the other servants following her.

We were alone now, and clasping my hot hands on my mother's soft white arm, I drew her down towards me.

"Mamma," I whispered—and oh! even now, after so many years, I feel in my veins a faint echo of the agonized thrill of fever, the sharp quivering terror that pierced me through as I spoke—"mamma, Paul is there!"

I pointed with unsteady hand to Dominica's door, but as I held my arm up it stiffened and grew rigid, the index pointing like a finger of stone. My mother, with a white face, tried to strike my arm down, but it resisted her efforts.

"Dominica!" she shrieked.

The woman came instantly, entering from her own room.

"Is this true what she says? Is he here again?"

"It is true," said Dominica, shrugging her shoulders. "I guessed she had seen him. Now, idiot!" she continued, turning fiercely to me, "do you perceive why madame had no desire for your company so near to her? do you perceive why I would not give to that peasant my room?"

I made no answer, and my hand pointed still. My whole frame now seemed growing rigid beneath the hysterical convulsion that shook me. Again my mother struck at my arm, this time almost with cruelty.

"What is to be done?" she cried. "This child is getting worse. I'm positively afraid

of her. I won't live in the same house with her. I've told the colonel so already. I can't be driven mad by fear. It's my belief she's bewitched by that old sorceress Mildred. Esther, put down your arm and go to sleep."

"Sleep! sleep!" I moaned uneasily, "I can't sleep. I think I never sleep."

"Do you hear her?" said my mother. "I can't stay in the house if she goes on like this. Do you remember how she wandered about last winter? I thought I should have died the night she came into my room. Esther, put down your arm, unless you want to make me think that old witch Mildred has put a devil into you to torment me."

"Paul! send away Paul! He's a murderer!"

And my eyes, wildly distended, followed the direction of my pointing hand, as, in mad terror, I fancied I saw his shadow crossing the doorway. My fear of this man had something in it scarcely justified even by my knowledge of him. I believe now it was a prophetic instinct—a foreboding of future horror.

"Send him away, down by the little staircase," said my mother hurriedly.

"Do you suppose he'll go without money?" answered Dominica.

My mother looked bewildered; she put her hand to her brow.

"I wish I were dead," she murmured.

"I am weary of it all. I played madly to-night, hoping to win something for him; but I lost, and here"—she tossed her purse to her confidante—"that's all I have. Give it to him, and tell him to go to destruction with it and drag me with him."

She flung herself heavily on the bed, shrinking in her dislike, however, from my touch, while at the same instant the figure of Paul stood in the doorway. A scream would have escaped me but for her hand, which, quick as lightning, pressed my lips.

"Is this the pittance you give, brother?" asked the evil man in a sharp whisper, coming forward with a creeping, hushed step—a step that seemed used to a stealthy, secret tread.

"How dare you say you are my brother?" The child—

"I know who he is," said I wearily. "Let him say it."

But as he approached me I shrank from him with a great horror, while Dominica rushed forward and locked the door that opened on the corridor.

"Lucy," said the man, flinging the purse into her lap, "I'm not to be put off with a beggar's dole like that. Curse you! don't you live warm, and lie soft? don't you eat, drink, and be merry, while you turn me out to the winds?"

"I can't help it," cried my mother, "no more. Oh, go away!"

"No more! And look at yo—

monds, shining like a devil's sun on your head!"

"As Heaven may help me," said my mother, "they are no diamonds! I've pawned the real ones for you, and these are false, which I have made to deceive the world and my husband."

"Whew!" whistled Paul Polwhele. "Give me back the purse then, and get me some money in a day or two. Here, Lucy, you and I have seen plenty of misery together; we won't quarrel; give us a kiss, girl."

Weeping, my mother kissed him, her white arm around his wicked neck.

"Now, since you know me, give your uncle a kiss, little one," he said, turning to me. "You don't look as if you'd trouble this world long. Not much like Alice, is she?"

I strove to move my stony hand to push him away, but the rigid muscles still refused to obey my will, and he stooped over me unresisted, while I felt I should certainly die if his lips touched me; but at this instant a step came swiftly along the passage, and a hand tried the door.

"Thank God! that is Dr. Spencer," I cried out, bursting into happy tears.

"Who?" exclaimed Paul Polwhele, in a ghastly whisper, as his evil face became suddenly blanched with fear.

The doctor knocked impatiently at the door.

"Can I come in?" he said.

Paul Polwhele for a moment stood powerless at his voice, my hand pointing at him still.

"You are a murderer!" said I slowly. "Go away!"

"Hasn't Mildred Tremaine confessed yet that I never touched a hair of her sister's head?" he whispered fiercely, stooping over me so low that my mother could not hear his words. "Ask her the secret of the Red Room."

I gasped for breath, and gazed at him like one thunderstruck, but I had no time for speech or question. All his thought now was to escape. He had held my arm down by force as he spoke, but it sprang up again as he released it, and pointed to him to the last as his evil shadow disappeared through the doorway of Dominica's room.

It was not till another door was opened softly, and the sound of a stealthy step beyond had reached my ears, that my mother with an expressive gesture of silence rose and opened to the impatient knocking of Dr. Spencer's hand.

At sight of his face a sudden glow fell over me, a release as from chains gladdened me, and my hand, which had felt the stony death in it, fell down in warm life and love upon his neck, while my sobbing lips kissed his cheek.

Tears started to his eyes as he lavished soothing words and tender caresses over me

like refreshing dew, yet in the midst of his soft pity for me, I thought his gaze wandered suspiciously round the room.

"Who has been here, Esther?" he said. "What has frightened you?"

I clung close to him, so close he must have felt the beating of my childish, terror-stricken heart; but I dared not reply to his question.

"How can they answer to themselves," he asked, glancing at my mother's disturbed face, "for terrifying a child whose peculiar temperament exposes her to horrors of the imagination, and terrors of the mind beyond the power of blunter natures to conceive? Fear, hate, and solitude have killed many such children as Esther. You risk her life or her reason, madam. Such an organization as here is not fitted to bear dislike, cruelty, or terror."

"Who says she has had to bear either?" asked my mother, carelessly. "She has been brought up by Mildred Tremaine; that accounts to me for her being more like a witch than a child, and it would still account to me, even if she were more horribly supernatural than she is, if that were possible."

So saying, she swept from the room indolently, as if the matter too little concerned her to admit of her accepting any further discussion on it; yet in going her eyes said "Silence" to me as plainly as eyes could speak. It was strange that she—and all who trusted in my secrecy, liking or disliking me—never once suspected I could betray them. Blind, walled up in darkness as their souls might be, they yet saw that.

"Mamma says Miss Mildred has bewitched me," said I, clinging to the doctor, "or else I am possessed."

"Some people," answered the doctor, smiling, "are possessed with a deaf and blind spirit, and it is a pity he is not a dumb one too—he might then do less mischief. But we'll talk of all that to-morrow. Drink this, Esther," he continued, pouring a few drops of a dark liquid into a glass of water, "and try to compose yourself."

I did as he desired, while the kindest hand that ever smoothed an aching brow touched mine with gentle, caressing fingers, and tenderly placed my weary head on my pillow. But the nervous excitement from which I had suffered could not so soon be calmed; and although my father had now silently entered the room and sat down by Dr. Spencer's side, and both soothed me with anxious kindness, still I could not sleep. My eyes wandered restlessly, shrinking round the room, and convulsive starts still shook my frame.

"She is afraid of that door," whispered the doctor to my father. "Who sleeps there?" he asked softly, glancing towards Dominica's room.

"Crummell's dog," answered Jenifer, who had glided in, and stood at the foot of my bed.

"And who there?" pointing to another door.

Jenifer made a short gulp, as though some word had arisen in her throat which she stopped there.

"Mrs. Treganowen," she said with a snap, shutting up her mouth like a tight purse.

"My poor birdie," said the doctor, "I don't wonder you cannot sleep. You and I, colonel, might slumber soundly with a cross-fire of hatred and motherly dislike—I grieve to say it—hissing over our heads, but unsheathed nerves like Esther's have no chance of rest in such a neighborhood. Cannot we put her in another room?"

How truly the doctor divined my fear of that deadly door!

"I don't know much about this house," answered my father uneasily; and I saw he dreaded some unpleasant scene with my mother. "I found Esther in a room to which she cannot return; it was only a garret."

"Better a garret than this, if it is safe and quiet. Come, Jenifer, let us go on an exploring expedition. Will you give me leave to find a room, colonel?"

The doctor took a light in his hand as he spoke, and, at a sign of acquiescence from my father, rose, followed by Jenifer, who beamed all over with rays like a shining sunflower.

"First, we'll look here, Jenifer."

He walked straight into Dominica's room, while I counted his steps by my beating heart.

"Do you want any thing?" asked the thin, sharp, foreign voice of my mother's maid.

"Merely to look around me," answered the doctor coldly.

"Really, sir—"

"Pray what door is that? Jenifer, hold the candle close, and let me see."

"You need not trouble yourself, sare. I have no thieves hid here. That's a door opening on a little stairs."

"So I perceive. And whither do the stairs lead?"

"Into the street, sare, I believe—I don't know—the door at the bottom is nailed by order of madame."

These words were no sooner spoken than, by a slight noise and a chuckle of great satisfaction on the part of Jenifer, I divined the doctor had descended the staircase. I glanced at my father; there was no suspicion, no fear on his face.

"So far from the door being nailed up, I found it partly open," said the voice of the doctor after a moment's silence. "I have locked it, and shall take the key to your master."

Not a word from Dominica; doubtless her passion was too great.

"You have heard?" said the doctor, en-

tering. "I would advise you to take charge of this key yourself, colonel, till you get the door walled up; nailing won't do. I suspected the child was frightened. Some lover, some rascal, some thief, perhaps, connected with that woman, inadvertently betrayed his presence to her. Is it so, Esther?"

It was useless to deny the truth to his clear sense. "I saw a man," I whispered. And I began to tremble again excessively.

"Not a word more, Esther. Don't speak of him—don't think of him."

"I'll speak to my wife," said my father, rising like a man who feels a duty forced on him. "The woman must leave."

The doctor looked pained. "Say nothing to Mrs. Treganowen," he interposed; "she is attached to the woman. Wall up the door—that will be sufficient. But it is evident the sooner Esther is with my mother the better."

"She shall go to-morrow," replied my father.

The doctor stooped suddenly and kissed me, his eyes shining with an intense delight. Jenifer clapped her hands and laughed.

"Now, Jenifer, we'll find a room for to-night."

When the doctor set about it, the matter no longer seemed difficult; and my father carried me, wrapped in a large shawl, to a pretty chamber on the other side of the house, far away from the dreaded door and the shadow of Paul Polwhele.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

THE next day my mother received me with more than her wonted coldness, disguising less than ever the shuddering dislike, half fear, with which I impressed her. As I sat timidly silent in her room, the sound of masons at work reached us through the open door.

"I hope, miss, you have done mischief enough for one day," said Dominica, in her thin, jerking voice, as she closed the door and left us. I do not further copy her foreign phraseology—it would but embarrass my story.

I turned to my mother imploringly. "I could not help being frightened, mamma. And—and is it not a good thing that he cannot come any more?"

"There are more ways than one of worrying a hunted dog," said my mother, snappishly. "There is no telling what he will do now, and perhaps I shall be driven to ask Mildred for help, and I had better ask Old Nick at once, I believe."

"Oh, mamma, don't say so! Surely Miss Mildred is not so wicked!"

"I believe—every thing—they say—"

against her," replied my mother, enunciating her words with slow, clear distinctness. "Why does she never dare to touch Paul? You heard what I said, Esther, that day when you were taken ill? Well, it is true." Here she leant towards me, and whispered low. "I was a little child—a very wretched, forlorn child, Esther—and I saw him do it. He didn't mean to kill that unhappy girl, but he struck her a blow in his anger, and she fell dead!"

My mother put her hands over her face, and remained silent some time. It seemed to me that I could see the shudder that crept over her, yet, in spite of her genuine horror and her solemn words, I believed the man's denial of the crime, and I believed Miss Mildred's letter.

"For our sakes Miss Mildred may not like to hurt your brother, mamma."

The word "brother" stung me, but I said it.

"Ah! it's like Mildred," said my mother, angrily, "to tell you that secret. The horrible old ogress!—putting the mother in the power of the child!"

"Mamma, you cannot think"—I began.

"Stuff!" said my mother; "you needn't protest. I don't consider you an idiot. You don't wish to have your mother disgraced, and your uncle hanged; that wouldn't add to your happiness, I presume, so I give you credit for sense enough to hold your tongue. You'll be quiet, as much for your own and your father's sake as for mine; only it is not pleasant to me your knowing it, and that's why that walking monument told you who Paul was."

"It was Miss Admonitia who told me," said I, shortly, feeling it useless to waste words in assurances that I had more generous reasons for keeping this terrible secret than mere selfishness.

My mother rubbed her nose with great irritation, and flung herself on the sofa among a heap of shawls, as usual.

"Poke the fire, child, and don't talk nonsense. Adder or Mildew, what does it matter which old frump it was? There's not much difference between them—one is a death's-head upon a mopstick, and the other is the mopstick without the death's head, that's all. I'll give Mildew credit for that—she has got a head. It mayn't be an agreeable one; it may be like a witch's snipost, which means there's all sorts of devilry within, but it isn't a numskull like her sister's. I believe your father was right enough when he had that shining white viper taken up on suspicion. Ugh! it makes me shudder to think of her! She hated her sister like poison. She would have given all her fortune to have her put out of the way. And I have no doubt in my own mind she did pay pretty heavily to have her carried off that night.

What become of the money she drew from her banker's just before the robbery! It was mighty easy to say the burglars took it; it would be just as easy, and a little truer, I expect, to say she gave it to them."

"But, mamma," said I, "if, as you say, you saw the blow struck that killed the unfortunate Miss Alicia, you must surely know, too, with whom she quitted Treval, and whether she went willingly or was taken by force."

My mother raised herself on her elbow to look at me in a surprised way.

"These are just the very two points that I don't know," she said.

"But, mamma, where were you? How came you to see Alicia?" I persisted. "It is horrible to think it, but were you with the robbers?"

I sank my voice to a whisper as I spoke, and gazed at her in shrinking dread.

"Well," exclaimed my mother, "in all my life, Esther, I never saw such a child as you! If I was with the robbers I could not help it, I suppose, any more than you could help sleeping in the garden of our bungalow with a great cobra standing on his tail watching you, a thing which happened when you were about four years old, and I told your father it was quite typical of the guardianship to which he was going to send you in England. And now I think we had better change the subject of our conversation—it is rather a dangerous one to talk about. You know too much already. Esther, and I cannot enlighten you further at present by explaining all the circumstances under which I saw Alicia Tremaine. I was young to be to blame then for any thing curring around me, and now my only sin in keeping these things a secret from my father. Esther, you may pity me or no, you choose, but I dare not tell him. There isn't too much love between us now, but there is any creature on earth whom Colonel Treganowen would hate with his whole soul, it would be the sister of the man who killed Alicia. Paul knows his power, and he threatens at times to fly beyond seas, from his safe asylum confess all to the colonel, and so insure our misery. It is only lately he has told me that the wretched girl whom I saw die was Alicia, and that fact has hung like a sword over my head ever since. To get at the murderer of the woman he loved, Colonel Treganowen would sacrifice his wife and his children, besides hating us for having any of that man's blood in our veins. Beware, Esther, how you open your lips, for your father would trample on your body and on mine to bring Paul to justice."

I turned pale and shuddered at the picture she drew of the hate and vengeance slumbering in my father's heart, ready to spring into life at a touch. I felt it to be true.

"I'm tired to death with talking," continued my mother, "and I know I had something more to say to you—I can't recollect what. Oh! do you prowl about by night as you used to, like an unhealthy, stalking, staring ghost, frightening one into fits?"

"I never knew I did, mamma," I answered, alarmed by her words. "I am sure I don't do so now."

"Well, I am glad of it, because if you do I wouldn't advise you to share your room with a schoolfellow. You'll turn her brain with your supernatural, ghostly ways."

I gazed at my mother in mute surprise and pain.

"There is only one young lady at Mrs. Spencer's, I believe, mamma—a Miss Weston—a ward of yours, I think."

To my intense surprise, my mother flung her shawls aside and sprang up from the sofa.

"Do you mean to say you are going to Mrs. Spencer's?" she cried.

"Yes, mamma."

"Then I shall take Alice away! I'm not going to have her frightened to death by a little weird, unearthly thing like you. You can't help it, I suppose, as you were brought up in a vault at Treval, but you are positively terrible. I'd rather live with the witch of Endor than with you."

"I tried to keep the tears back that started in my eye, but they fell down drop by drop, while my mother continued, without seeing them—

"This is just what I might expect from Colonel Treganowen—selfishly exposing Alice to your influence, whether I like it or not; but I shall not submit to it—I shall take her away. It must be his doing—that the mummy Mildred would never consent to her being with Alice."

"I did not tell her how Mildred's consent had been gained. I did not say, 'Who is Alice, for whom you care more than for your own child?' I folded my hands, and looked at her in hopeless and silent pain. My mother began to pace the room hurriedly.

"Why should I be kept under the thumb of those skeletons at Treval?" she exclaimed passionately. "Two dried sticks, with no more feeling in them than in a bamboo cane! As to Mildred, she's like a snake in spirits—a white thin viper in a bottle, looking alive when it's dead, with this difference, you feel *she* can come to life if she likes, and strike you with her fangs. Ah! I wish she was bottled up! I'd keep the cork in, I'll be bound."

"I thought she was your friend, mamma," I ventured to say. "You said at Falmouth she had helped you at some sad time of your life."

"You remember every thing, you dreadful little pocket-book!" said my mother, with

great irritability. "That's just it. She did help me, and a pretty price she has had for it! From the first time she laid her cold, sickly, white fingers on me, when have I felt like any thing else but a skinned eel? And I don't get used to it like the eels do. But she shall never lay her silken, treacherous touch upon Alice. And you, Esther, how can you like these old witches?" she cried, suddenly breaking off from her soliloquy to address me angrily.

I looked up astonished. It was the first time I had been accused of *liking* them, and, questioning my heart now, it did seem to me that a strange tenderness lurked within it for those forlorn weird sisters, mingled, with regard to Miss Mildred, with a distrust and repulsion which I yet felt some feather's weight in the scale might turn to an overpowering love and reverence.

"Don't deny it," continued my mother. "You like them better than you do me, you unnatural little thing! I know you do!"

Why are egotists so unjust as always to expect from others the love and duty they leave unpaid themselves?

"And you, of all others, Esther, have reason to hate them. The great fortune you inherit—for Treganowen and Treval will both be yours—will not compensate you for what you lose. And that's just the point I'm debating now, whether I'll tell you what your loss is or no. I don't pretend to understand Mildred's schemes, though there can't be any thing in her mind sweeter than poison and revenge; but I have no doubt if I were to tell you only one thing, I should overturn them as easily as I kick over this footstool."

My mother upset the stool as she spoke, hurting her foot in doing so, which evidently increased her ill-temper, for she limped to the sofa with tears in her eyes, and spoke with less reticence than ever.

"I am not a deceitful woman, Esther, whatever my bad qualities may be. I permitted you to see very soon that I didn't like you, and I tell you so again now."

A burning flush of pain and anger flashed hot over my face, and my hands, lying on my lap, clasped and unclasped convulsively, but I uttered no word in reply.

"And I'll tell you why," continued my mother. "Colonel Treganowen can't beat me, I suppose, for telling that much. Part of my bargain with that unbottled viper was, that she was to have you to bring up as she chose. Now a mother naturally loves her child; but if I had loved you, she would always have had her soft, silky hand on the sorest spot in my heart, cruelly tormenting it. So, not being an eel, not choosing to be skinned in more places than I could help, I determined in self-defence *not* to like you. I made that resolve on the day you were born"—here my mother shut her eyes, as if she were remembering some incident vivid-

ly—"and I succeeded. If Mildred had whipped you to death as a child, or shut you up in a dark closet every night to make you mad, I should only have laughed at her. Not one strip of skin has she ever peeled off my body through you, Esther. But in another quarter she has me in her power. There she can put her fangs in my heart if she chooses."

I thought my mother alluded to Paul, and the new insight into her feelings that she now gave me brought a sense of pity into my heart for her, perceiving, as I did, that even her want of love to her child was worthy of pity, being, as it were, only an instinct of self-defence, while her love for Paul left her vulnerable. And so I respected the emotion that worked in her lips and paled her face as she spoke. The gnawing root of her agitation, however, whatever it might be, only made her hate me the more.

"You irritate me to death, Esther," she said. "You sit there so calm and cold; you have no more feeling than those old death's-head sat Treval. What do these old maids think a mother is, I wonder, that they play with a mother's heart as they would with a toy? Do you suppose it would have been no pleasure to me, Esther, to like my own child? Is it no loss to you and me, the want of this affection that would have existed if you had belonged to me as Nature intended, and if you had not—worse still—been set up as an instrument of torture, and beggar some one whom I can and do love?"

"God! what would I not have given to have fallen back on my mother's neck, and cried out, 'Oh, mother, mother! love me a little! only a little! The crumbs that fall from the full feast of your affection for this other give to me, and I in return will pour into your lap the harvest of a full heart!'"

But I could not speak. I trembled from head to foot. I burned and shivered in a breath, as the thought struck me that this other was not Paul, but the unknown Alice, whose height I had notched upon the old ash-tree—the Alice whom Stephen had called "little wife"—the Alice Dr. Spencer had praised—the Alice whose pure white bed, like a soft nest, lay so close to my mother's room that her eye fell on it through the open door—last in sleeping, first on waking.

I bent my head lower and lower on my hands, and tears fell through the fingers.

"Ah, I'm glad to see you have some feeling," was all my mother said, as, wrapped in her shawls, she looked alternately at the fire and at me.

Apparently she was in deep thought, and I perceived by the earnestness of her gaze that I was the subject of her cogitations; but whatever her hesitation was concerning me, she soon flung it off.

"Would you like a pretty ring, Esther?" she said, kindly.

"If you gave it to me, mamma." But a vague uneasiness shook my voice as I spoke.

"I recollect you don't seem to care much for money," observed my mother, thoughtfully. "Bring that inlaid box over here, and choose a ring."

I handed her the box. "Please choose one for me, mamma. I shall like your choice best."

She turned the rings over many times, and, in spite of my shrinking reluctance to observe the fact, I was forced to see the unwilling, lingering touch of her fingers, and the sigh with which she at last handed me the least valuable of the set.

"You may kiss me if you like, Esther," she said.

I kissed her and burst into tears.

"It doesn't give you much pleasure, I perceive, to have a present. I suppose you don't think the ring is good enough for you?"

"Oh, mamma! mamma!" I cried, hastily wiping my misinterpreted tears, "the ring is beautiful."

"Well, put it on. I am glad you are pleased, though crying is an odd way of showing pleasure. Ah! the ring is too large, I see. I never saw such fingers as yours—they are too small to be human. I declare they are like a sick chicken's white claws."

I bore this comparison quietly, hiding my obnoxious hands, and waiting silently for my mother to continue.

"Esther, you are a very odd girl, but you are certainly clever, and I want you to help me in something I have at heart. Alice you know—"

I started and looked up. "What can I know about Alice, mamma?" I said, impatiently.

"You may know this much, that she shall not stay with you at Mrs. Spencer's. I am afraid to permit you to be together. You'll hurt and terrify Alice—you needn't interrupt, you don't know what I mean—it is enough that I have made up my mind on this point. But how am I to manage it? The colonel is as obstinate as a mule, the doctor is a gate-post, and Mildred a rock; nevertheless, I verily believe you can get your own way with them all if you choose, so you must just say that you won't go to Mrs. Spencer's—that you prefer going to school instead."

I turned pale, and a faint sickness seized my heart. Was this to be my return for all Dr. Spencer's kindness?

"I can't say that, mamma, indeed I cannot."

"So you refuse me after all my kindness?" said my mother, glancing at the ring sparkling on my finger. An inclination to tear it off and fling it on the floor seized me, but I restrained myself.

"Ask me something else, mamma."

"I have nothing else to ask. Alice is all I care for in the world; if you are her companion, you'll make her like yourself, and I'd rather see her die than see her like you."

I suppressed the low cry that almost burst from my lips, and stood up trembling.

"Mamma, why do you care for Alice Weston so much?"

"Why do I care for Alice!—why?"—exclaimed my mother, staring at me in an amazed way. But this was only for an instant; the next she had sunk back among her shawls, and, biding her lips, she said angrily—

"What is that to you, Esther? Don't ask questions. Why did I marry Colonel Treganowen to make myself miserable?" she exclaimed, bursting into sudden passion. "So you'll go to Mrs. Spencer's, and in a few days Alice will know all you know about Paul. She'll learn to hate me—to despise me—she who is so proud of her ancient name, she will think of me only as the sister of a felon! And is that bitterness enough for me? No!—Alice cannot keep a secret; she would not have the facts that you know in her possession a single day without going straight to the colonel, and divulging all; and the result would be strife, hatred, separation, divorce. Your father would quit me forever—would he live with the sister of Alicia's murderer? And would he withhold his hand from Paul for your sake or for mine? I tell you he would bring my brother to the gallows, if he trod upon our graves to do it."

My mother's passion and terror altered her voice and her face. All beauty died out of it, as, pallid and distorted, her features worked and quivered with fear and anger.

"I should never tell this Alice Weston any of the secrets of my family," said I, in a tone of contempt.

These words maddened my mother. "This Alice Weston!" she repeated, in an accent of indescribable passion. "Is that the way—" But something checked her words, though not her agitation. She started from the sofa, and came towards me, her shawls falling on the floor in a rich heap of color, and taking me by the arms she looked in my face.

"And I repeat to you, Esther Treganowen, that you would tell this Alice Weston every thing. Not by day; but a random question from her at night would elicit all. You are two girls; awake, you are as secret as the grave; asleep, you are open as the day. Now go to Mrs. Spencer's at your peril, ruin your mother, drive Alice into a madhouse, and hang your uncle. You and your father doubtless could still comfort each other. You are capable of going to Paul's execution, and consoling yourselves on your

way home with pious reflections. But so help me Heaven!"—and she used here coarse, strong words, such perhaps as she had heard in her youth—"your father shall not hear this from Alice's lips! Go to Mrs. Spencer's, and I swear to you by the fiery blood of all the devils, I will seek him instantly, and tell him every thing myself."

Something of the coarse nature of her brother flashed through the mask of her beauty, as my mother's passion burst the threads that the courtesies and gentleness of her later life had wrapped about her, and broke forth in the strong hideousness of this language. I do not think she could have resisted the temptation to give me that furious shake, which seemed nearly to break up my small frame, as she flung me from her. Exhausted and frightened, I reeled into a chair, while my mother, gathering up her shawls, threw herself on the sofa, and burst into a paroxysm of tears.

It seemed to me that not my face alone but my heart was bloodless, so cold and deathly had her words made me feel. "Mamma," I said, and my voice quivered with a strange anguish, "if it be true that I talk in my sleep, I cannot of course answer for my secrecy. Any precaution I took in locking my door would not seem sufficient to your fears; you would always imagine some slight accident might betray the truth to Miss Weston. I will not go to Mrs. Spencer's."

Some minutes ago I heard the doctor's step in the hall, and I knew he was now in the library with my father; the thought of his gladsome presence there awaiting me, quivered through me like a poisoned arrow, yet I went on in a quieter voice, "I will do this for you, mamma, but I will not keep your ring."

I drew my mother's bribe from my finger, and laid it on the table, then I left the room without another word, and crept down stairs pale and shivering.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

At the library door, with my cold fingers on the lock, I paused a moment ere I gathered courage to turn it, and found myself confronting the genial face and kindly smile of the friend who never failed me. I walked straight up to the young man, and put my hand in his, but I spoke to my father.

"Papa, I am come to say that I cannot go to Mrs. Spencer's. I know I am a strange girl, and you have been indulgent—most indulgent—bear with me now. I cannot go."

The tight clasp in which I held the doctor's hand must have hurt him, and I knew, through the pressure of this clasp, he felt

the trembling of my whole frame, but he said nothing, though his earnest gaze seemed riveted on my small white face. The pain, the mystery of my position, the ignorance and bewilderment under which I acted, confused me, and I returned his look in hopeless, helpless sorrow. A little while ago, and I had rejected Alice's companionship in pride, perhaps in hate; now she—or my mother for her—was rejecting mine as terrible and dangerous. Yet this second rejection was to appear to come from me, with all its accompanying ingratitude and its heartless disregard of my father's wishes. No thought of the false light in which I should stand had crossed my mother's mind as she demanded this sacrifice of me. She loved only Alice; my father—God help my jealous heart! I saw it—loved her too, and there was yet another who loved her; still I was not to be angry, I was not to hate; for her sake I was to grieve my father, I was to lose my friend!

In these few ink-words in which I strive to paint a feeble picture of my pain, there lives only a faint image of the strong suffering with which I battled as I spoke the first short sentence to my father. What would I have given to have thrown my arms around his neck, and hide my poor little worn face on his shoulder, that he might read the truth in my tears and the throbbing of my heart, for speech to tell him I had none!

"What is the meaning of this, Esther?" he said, sternly.

My chest heaved, my lips quivered. "I cannot go," I answered.

"This is childish folly—you must go!" he replied, with increased anger. "I quit England in a few days to brave all the chances and hazards of war, to face death in countless ways, and this is the time you choose to fill me with anxiety and pain! How can I leave if you refuse to accept the safe and happy asylum I have secured for you? You are not a child, and I expected sense and kindness from you, Esther."

The pain and disappointment in his tone blinded my eyes with tears. I tried to say again, "I cannot go," but I broke down, and only turned a wild look on him, shaking my head as a negative.

"If I lay my commands on you, Esther, you must obey, but I am willing to hear your reasons. Why do you object to Mrs. Spencer's? Is it possible you dislike the doctor?" For answer, I looked at Hubert Spencer. I looked full into those wonderful eyes that no other face had, or ever could have, and the clasp of my small hand appealed to him with the eloquence of a thousand words, pleading for his help. With what childish love and confidence I looked, I never knew till he told me in after years.

"It is not that; she does not dislike me," he said.

At these words I broke from him and ran

to my father, and kneeling down by his chair, I clasped his arm, and sobbed speechless. But, angry with my unreasoning disobedience as he deemed it, he would have raised me sternly, had not the doctor come to my help.

"Leave her alone a little," he said; "she is so troubled she cannot speak. Remember her painfully sensitive nature, and how strangely it has been tried," he added, in a low voice.

At these words my father stooped and kissed me. Then I gained courage; I spoke out wildly—

"Oh, papa, take me back to Treval! Let me stay there while you are away! I have read of long-imprisoned captives set free who wept to be taken back to their dungeons. I am like them. I am only fit for Treval. I have been lonely all my life. I could not bear strangers—above all, this girl, Alice Weston. What do I know of girls? I could not endure to be with her—I should be afraid of her—I should feel in chains in her presence. I have always been companionless; I want no schoolfellows, no friends, no sisters. Papa, take me back to Treval, where I shall be lonely again; and forgive me, or I shall die."

Some great emotion worked in my father's face as I clung to him, holding his hands pressed against his cheeks, wetting them with tears.

"This is dreadful," he said, as if to himself. "What does it mean?" he added, turning to Dr. Spencer. "She showed no repugnance to our plan at Treganowen, and even so late as yesterday, she seemed content and glad."

I dared not follow his glance; I could not look at the face of Dr. Spencer; I was giving up all thoughts of seeing it, perhaps, forever; I was renouncing all my dreams of happiness beneath his roof—all my hope of living my daily life in the "full feast of his presence," as Jenifer had said; I was going back to hunger and emptiness—I was going back to prison at Treval.

"It means," began the doctor, in answer to my father, "that Esther—"

But here he stopped, for I turned suddenly and looked at him, imploring silence by a gesture. In the expression of his eye, in his glance towards my mother's portrait, I read that he had divined a portion of the truth.

"It means," he continued, "that Esther is sensitively nervous to the presence of a stranger. If Miss Weston were not with my mother, would you come?" he asked.

The hope that glowed within me at his words burnt on my face in a blush of fire.

"I would go then," I said softly.

"Colonel Treganowen," said Dr. Spencer, "you must remove Miss Weston from my mother's care. This is a fixed idea on Esther's part, and we must yield to it. All



things must yield to her health and happiness. I have set my heart on restoring her to you on your return, blooming in health and beauty. Give me my way. Miss Weston has no need of me. This poor little dove"—he lifted me from my father's feet, and gathered me in his arms—"has been terrified, imprisoned, wounded almost to death. I cannot give her up for twenty such blooming, flourishing flowers as Miss Alice Weston."

My father remained silent. Some deep pain sat upon his face, betraying a strength of sorrow I could not comprehend. Dr. Spencer regarded him with a look of respectful pity.

"It is a dis-appointment," he said—"a bitter one. I can comprehend all you feel. A great hope has quitted us both. We cannot help it. A forced companionship would bring none of the results we desire.

"Oh, Esther!" said my father, breaking forth in a cry of sorrow, "you know not what you do! I thought to quit England accompanied by one happy hope; you have killed it. Dr. Spencer, I will remove Alice, but, as you truly say, the disappointment is bitter. I thought to give my poor lonely child a companion. I hoped, in spite of Mildred's long hate, to find her a sister. Oh, Esther, you cannot dream the pain you give me."

With eyes full of pity he looked down upon me, and with eyes full of pity I looked up to him.

"Oh, my father!" I thought, "the pain of knowing that such a man as Paul Polwhele lives would be greater than this pain, so I gather courage to bear your words."

"Delay is useless. I will send the servants and carriage for Alice at once."

My father turned to leave the room, but, glancing towards my tearful face as I stood trembling with my hand on Dr. Spencer's arm, he came back and kissed me.

"Do not think I am angry, Esther," he said; "the fault of this is not all yours."

"This is your mother's doing," said Dr. Spencer, the moment my father had closed the door.

"Yes," I answered softly.

"Will you not tell me her reason?"

"No, never!"

I tightened my clasp on his arm, and turned pale at the thought.

"It does not matter—I shall find it out."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was decided at first that I should depart in the carriage which was going to Clifton to fetch Miss Weston, but as my father wished to show me the city, and make many purchases for me, Dr. Spencer proposed that Jennifer only should go in the chariot, and

that I should accompany him in his chaise, and it was thus arranged.

We started late in the afternoon, after a cold farewell from my mother, and many promises from my father to visit me as often as possible before he quitted England. If I felt sad on parting, Dr. Spencer soon beguiled my grief by little rills of talk, and laughter, and song which burst from him naturally, not as if he were pouring them forth to amuse me, but as if he could not help their bubbling up like a spring from the full fountain of his happy nature.

It was the beginning of October; day soon closed around us, and we travelled through a golden sunset into a rosy twilight, through which Night came daintily to meet us, gliding softly beneath her canopy of stars, pressing perfume with her feet from the autumn flowers. At her approach the winds crept into the trees to rest, and the incense-bearing air wrapped us about in hushed darkness like the leaves of a lotus-flower. Gradually silence fell down upon us—a silence dreamy and full, teaming with strange thought—not the shadowy thought of sleep, but visions that drop from the over-brimming cup of young life; these held me as in a spell, while the waving trees in uncertain shape passed by to the music of the horses' feet, and the melody and march of the sounding world as it travels stately through the night lulled me into a pleasant weariness, which stole upon me with a breathlike rest. And the doctor was silent too, holding me like a jewel in the warm ring of his arm, cradling my head on his shoulder; and thus resting, the visions dropped, then started up again, then danced brokenly in the shining shapes that came and went without a meaning, and I slept.

I slept, and yet in another carriage I saw myself sitting alone and sorrowful, only I was taller, fairer, and the glow of health mingled with the glow of light flashing from the lamp on my bright cheeks. But my eyes were wet with tears, and yet they smiled, and the old lost look had faded away, quenched in a sea of love in which they swam. Loose upon my shoulders my hair floated, and the golden wave of fire that rippled through it had died out in ebony blackness. And I was fair, very fair, and beautiful exceedingly, and leaning from the carriage window I put out a timid hand and arm steeped in the moon's rays like a mermaid's rising from a sea of silver, and I sought to touch the unlovely, weird, and solemn Esther, who, pale and sickly, slept on Hubert Spencer's arm.

"Ah, do not envy her her father's heart, she has but him in the world."

The voice came into my dream like his, but I slept on, and my hand—the hand of my other self—stretched far out from the window, and would have touched me on the brow, but another voice silver-clear rippled

in upon my sense, and I broke from my sleep with a cry trembling upon my lips—"Stephen!"

Who said it? what was it? I trembled as I asked myself. And in awaking I felt as though some shock had divided me in twain, taking from me that other self for whom such long years I had been dimly seeking. But I was alone with Dr. Spencer, and on one side the road was very dark, but on the other lights gleamed—a carriage was passing by, and for a moment's flash I saw the figure of a fair girl sitting alone, her face hidden in her clasped hands, her hair in a di-k shower covering her fair shoulders; then she was gone, and I should have thought the vision still a dream, save that the beat of the horses' hoofs and the rumble of the departing wheels were real sounds.

"Poor Alice!" said Dr. Spencer. "She was weeping; doubtless she is grieved to quit my mother."

And from out of the darkness a voice echoed, clear, and sweet, and sudden, as though a star had spoken, dropping silvery music to our feet.

"Poor Alice! she has wept the whole way." I turned, and on the dark side of the road loomed the figure of a horseman. "Do not be frightened," whispered Dr. Spencer, as the violent bound of my heart beat against his arm. "It is a friend of mine."

"I know him," I answered. Then I put my hand out and took his. "Thank you for the 'Faerie Queen.' I've read it through and through. You are escorting Alice, the girl you called your little wife; but there is no need; she is quite safe in papa's carriage, with two servants to protect her."

The young man laughed, and the moon-light made his face look pale.

"I am not escorting Alice, Miss Treganowen; I happened to be going this road to-night, that's all. Are the ladies of Treval well?"

"They are well," I answered.

"And you—are you better?"

I felt the tightened clasp of the doctor's arm, but I released myself from it, and leaned from the window.

"The carriage is fast disappearing. Had you not better gallop after it, instead of asking questions to which you scarcely desire an answer?"

"We are friends, I hope?" said Miss Admonitia's godson, riding up quite close, and putting his hand on the window-sill.

I made no reply.

"Ah, I see you are still thirteen hundred years old—"

"No, I am fourteen now; indeed, nearly fifteen—"

"But no younger," broke in the young man, "and as much my enemy as ever. Farewell, fair Capulet. Won't you say adieu?"

"Why adieu?" I asked. And a slight quiver on my lip made me stop short.

"I go to-morrow to Southampton, and thence to Lisbon. My guardian griffins at Treval seem to think a little killing will do me good. I have liberty to risk shooting, drowning, and hanging for three years; then I return to—to my fate, I suppose," he added, carelessly.

"What can it matter to me where he goes?" I asked myself.

"Well, I'm glad of it," I said.

"Glad for what? That I go to my death, or return to my fate—which?"

"I am glad you go. Thank you again for the 'Faerie Queen.' Good-by; the carriage is out of sight."

"Your feelings do you credit, Miss Treganowen. Had you shown me the least kindness, I was about in return to promise you that I would get killed if I could; and if not, I would defend your father, and bring him back safe from the tide of war, if friendship and affection can do it."

"Are you going with my father?" I cried. "If you will indeed try to guard him—" I stopped, a little confused.

"If I guard him?" repeated Stephen, bending low from his saddle. "Pray finish. I feel like a knight of old, about to be rewarded by some fair queen of beauty."

I knew he was quizzing me, and my face flushed, while Dr. Spencer appeared irritated.

"Excuse me," he said, "I am going to close this window. When one has charge of an heiress, one must be careful of her health. You know I am guarding here the houses of Treganowen and Treval."

I could not understand the shaft, but it struck home, for the young man's laugh fell suddenly into a blank silence.

"You will find it difficult to overtake Miss Weston now," continued the doctor.

"Had you not better make haste?"

"What does it matter about Miss Weston? She is not an heiress, you know," answered Stephen, bitterly. "If the coachman tilts her into the hedge, and breaks her neck, half a county will not go into mourning for her."

"But that is not the case here," observed the doctor in his blandest manner, "so pray permit me to put up the window."

His hand was on it, when Stephen stopped him in a polite but cold tone.

"One moment, I beg. Miss Treganowen, pray shake hands with me, and say good-by. You may wish a shot may reach me if you like. I don't much care. I am a sad, reckless dog, and good for nothing else but food for powder. When you write to Miss Mildred, you will not tell her we met as enemies?"

"I have never mentioned you to Miss Mildred, and it is not likely I ever shall," I answered.

"Oh, really? Well, I'm glad of it," he said, in a relieved tone. "I fear you would

not paint me in *coulour de rose*, and you know I have a wholesome fear of Miss Mildred, and don't wish to offend her."

During this speech he bent forward, and seemed to be endeavoring to look at me, but I held my face out of the moonlight and disappointed him.

"If you fear our meeting as enemies would offend her, you can put your mind at ease. I have no enmity or any other feeling regarding you that I am aware of, except being much obliged to you for the book."

An expression, half vexed, half amused, passed over his face.

"Old as ever," he said.

"Older," I answered.

"And in all else unchanged, I presume?" he returned, trying again to peer into my face. The slight sarcasm in his tone cut the reins of my temper.

"I am quite as plain as ever, and as steadfast as ever in my likes and dislikes, and in resistance to all tyranny, present and future. The carriage is out of sight, and papa's horses are good; you have lost all chance of overtaking Miss Weston."

I leaned back on my seat with the air of a person who intends to say nothing more, and again Dr. Spencer would have closed the window, but Stephen's hand interposed. He held it out towards me, and my fingers were clasped within it, with scarcely a consciousness on my part that I was obeying his wish.

"Without malice, Miss Treganowen?" he asked.

"Certainly," I faltered, as, hiding in shadow, I glanced at his handsome face, shining in the moonlight.

"Let us say good-by kindly," he continued. "No need to torment each other now. We shall have time enough for that in our future lives. You are only a child—you cannot understand how some things may make a man fume and fret, and show himself different to what he is." He wrung my hand, took off his hat to Dr. Spencer, and galloped away. The window remained open, and though I shivered perceptibly, my companion for a moment took no notice; then he closed it hastily.

"Esther, you took too much trouble to show Sir Stephen Tremaine you do not like him."

"Is that his name?" said I, evading a reply to this remark.

"Is it possible you did not know his name?" exclaimed the doctor.

"How should I? Have I not been brought up as a prisoner, through whose dungeon-doors no intelligence was ever permitted to penetrate? Who is Sir Stephen Tremaine?"

"I suppose I interfere with no family arrangements by giving you that simple information," said Dr. Spencer. "He is a distant relation of the Misses Tremaine,

through the sister of the first baronet, who made a runaway match, and was ever after repudiated by his family. However, on the death of Sir Theobald, his daughters sought out their cousin, who was living in great obscurity and poverty with his widowed mother at Bristol, and charged themselves with his education. And just before you came from India, Esther, they, conjointly with this lady, petitioned the crown that the baronetcy—extinct or dormant by their father's death—might be conferred on him. The county of Cornwall, you know, returns as many members, within two, as the whole kingdom of Scotland,<sup>1</sup> and so many boroughs are in the Misses Tremaine's hands, that no request of theirs was likely to be refused. Their young relative, Stephen Carpenter, had the baronetcy, and took the name of Tremaine; they made him a handsome allowance, for he is quite dependent on them, and they give him every reason to suppose that at their death they will leave him ample means to keep up the rank they have procured him. Whether they annex any price to their gifts, Esther, I scarcely know, though by his irritable manner I sometimes fancy they do. His mother, to whom they gave a liberal annuity, is dead. These are facts every one knows, and I see no reason for secrecy, else I would not tell you."

I perceived the agreeable matrimonial arrangement which Stephen had betrayed to me was unknown to the doctor, although he might suspect it.

"And do you know Sir Stephen Tremaine very well?" I asked.

"No, I know him but very little. I have lived much abroad, and though on my return home I found him a frequent visitor at my mother's, yet as I went almost immediately to Trevalla, to be near a little patient who interested me, I did not get very intimate with Sir Stephen Tremaine. He has a house at Clifton, so we should have seen a good deal of him if he had not so suddenly made up his mind to join the army."

"He does not appear to be enthusiastic on the subject of fighting," said I, dryly.

The doctor laughed. "I assure you he was very comfortable at Clifton. He won't find life so easy in Spain. However, I am rather glad he is gone."

"Oh! if he had stayed at Clifton he would not have troubled your house much now Miss Weston has left it."

Dr. Spencer brought my face into the full sheen of the moonlight before he answered me.

"You have come curiously near a thought of my own, Esther," he said. "Miss Weston, although the same age as yourself, is not at all a child in appearance, and she is very beautiful, and I believe very poor. Now I imagine Sir Stephen is not a man who would ruin his prospects for love, and I

<sup>1</sup> A fact at that period.

should be sorry if your mother's ward formed an attachment to him, as I suspect Miss Mildred has schemes of her own respecting his future, on the fulfilment of which will depend his fortune."

My heart swelled within me. I knew the doctor's suspicion was correct, and Stephen Tremaine and I were both disposed of by a cruel family compact. I guessed that without me—whom he hated—he would never possess Treval, and I foresaw that the fear of poverty and habits of luxury to which his cousin's liberality had accustomed him would make him accede to this odious bargain. Tears stood in my eyes as a thousand indignant resolves and plans of resistance passed through my mind, and my spirit rose up in passionate remonstrance against my humiliating position. To be received as a hateful appendage to an estate, to feel that a man was compelled to take me or be ruined, was a bitter thought, and, young as I was, I understood the galling pain and shame of such a marriage.

"If Miss Mildred's scheme has to do with me—" I began passionately.

"Hush!" interrupted the doctor. "There are many suns must arise and set before they can speak of such things to you. And how do we know what change the years may bring? Why, the French may let the troublesome life out of Sir Stephen's well-knit frame before then, or Treganowen Towers may be undermined by a ghost, and you rendered a dowerless bride; he would not prove an importunate suitor in that case."

"You do not like Sir Stephen," I said.

"You are mistaken. He fascinates me, and I like him extremely, only in playing with a strange animal we yet guard against a bite, and there is an instinct in the lowest creature that breathes which tells it when peril is near. If that instinct pricks me sharply in Sir Stephen's presence can I help it? Here are the lights of Bristol."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHEN I saw Mrs. Spencer, I thought of Mr. Winterdale's words, that I should not think the mother much like the son, and I looked in vain for the sunshine and bright warmth of which he had spoken.

Mrs. Spencer was a handsome woman of a portly presence, not without kindness and geniality, a certain motherliness, as it were, pervading all she did; but the healthy, sound, clear, glad nature of her son, full of summer warmth, had in her stopped short at spring, and she was subject to many little frosts and changes, which nipped the full blow of love in the heart for her. As days glided on, and we quietly sank into a well-ordered household, workful, cheerful, and kindly, I began to study her more earnestly,

and my first discovery shocked me a little. I found she loved her brother better than she loved her son. Mr. Winterdale was her idol. He was held up for household worship on all occasions possible, and there was an incense of reverence sprinkled even over her commonest talk when his name slipped into it. The doctor bore this with a good humor all his own, a twinkle sometimes in his gray eyes, or a sly smile curling round his lips, alone betraying that he was aware of his mother's weakness. Nevertheless, I fancied at times that Mr. Winterdale was to him, like Sinbad's old man of the mountain, slightly oppressive, and this, not by reason of the too heavy shower of sisterly praise pouring over us from the household eaves, but for some cause known to himself, which shackled not his actions only, but even his free thought. This was my impression, and not being of the logical sex, I never reasoned on it, but waited patiently believing it, till time proved it correct.

There was a good library in the house, and on scanning the books with my usual hunger for eye, I was amazed to find Mr. Winterdale's name on the title pages of many—"A Treatise on Runic Inscriptions," "The Footsteps of the Lost Ten Tribes Patiently Tracked," "Druidical Characters Deciphered," "Siftings among the Ancient Phœnician Idolatries."

These and others I took down from their shelves, and looked at with a weary sigh. We may live near a man for years, and yet never see him with understanding eyes. We know no more what is in a man by our conventional acquaintance with him than we know the caves, the rocks, the springs, the flora, or hidden wealth of a mountain by measuring its shadow. My friends, it takes a long time to *see* a man. Bear this in mind when you meet a poet, a hero, or a worker in the mines of thought, and do not come away disappointed because the shadow you have seen was smooth, and ordinary, and perchance of as dull a gray as any other shadow you have jostled in life. Remember it is the shadow, not the man, and reflect also that yours may not be a vision that can see *more* than shadows, so be silent when you step back into nothingness, and neither hiss nor clap—what is your praise and what is your blame to him?

These men, witnesses for truth, whom we call by names that deify—prophet, poet, hero—are simply those whom God has endowed with a greater power to *suffer* than their brethren; and the earth which they too often water with their blood hides their pain and her remorse in monuments and crowns, and cries, Behold their glory.

With feelings of painful insignificance I took down the words of erudite research which Mr. Winterdale had given to the world from his quiet nook at Trevala. That such a man, hiding all his well won renown

from my childish reverence, should have condescended to be my tutor, daily training my mind, as I now tremblingly acknowledged, into the same untiring, tracking, twisting power of research, steeping my spirit in the same patient curiosity that characterized his own, amazed me. Breathlessly I dived into his motive for such a course of conduct, and put my hand on it without shrinking. I observed that every work he had written was a finding out of something hidden, a dragging forth of proofs, a digging up of musty facts, and I felt that he had not cared to know these things for themselves, but had worked to train his mind into a great power for patient investigations, that should never tire or flag. And to this end too he had moulded me, meaning to make me a trenchant weapon in his hand. That I had imbibed this spirit of search, patient, unflagging, that I was soaked through and through with it, I confessed, but that I would let it be turned against Miss Mildred I denied. He forgot that in giving me a spirit like his own he was perhaps only training me to be an equal foe.

I began a course of reading through his laborious works, not to know *them*, but to know *him*. Step by step I followed him through researches so wearisome that I marvelled more and more at the brain which could explore such dry, dusty caverns of thought, and never weary by the way.

Dr. Spencer laughed at my new studies; but as his mother watched me reading, a glow of pride warmed her face, and her admiration for me visibly increased. At first she had been inclined to consider me either incomprehensible or stupid, but seeing me interested in her brother's works, her judgment shifted, and I mounted to the topmost ring of her esteem. Thus I was for a moment surprised when, some time after my arrival at Clifton, she one morning suddenly refused me the key of the bookcase in which these precious volumes were enshrined, telling me with a fixed look that I was to read no more of them. The next instant I had guessed the truth, that it was her brother himself who had given these orders, knowing me better than she did, and mentally wincing at being morally dissected by the girl in whose spirit he had helped to create an artificial imp of curiosity.

Frequent letters passed between Mrs. Spencer and her brother, and I could not help feeling that I was often the subject of their correspondence.

In speaking of Mr. Winterdale I have slightly anticipated my narrative. I go back a little to say that I saw my father three times before he quitted England, that each time he evinced a tenderer solicitude for my happiness, and on parting was full of grief and affection, though neither his speech nor mine touched the topics perplexing our thoughts. He did not mention Stephen's

name, and a shyness that was almost pain withheld all questions from my tongue.

My mother did not accompany my father on either occasion, but after his departure she came and graciously thanked me for my obedience to her wishes—"my clever manoeuvring" she called it. She told me Alice was at school at Bath; then she whispered that Paul had got into a terrible scrape, and she had had to find money to help him to escape, and he was gone abroad. She seemed relieved at this, and in better spirits than when I had last seen her.

I go back again in my story to say that in Alice's room I found a "*Fairie Queens*" like mine, but new and unread, and it had her name in it, with "From her dear friend, Stephen Tremaine," written beneath. And many other tokens I found of his thought running through Alice's life like a golden thread. Here were his initials, intertwined with hers, carved on a tree in the garden, and her name was flourishing in a border of mignonette, doubtless sown by his hand. On her window-sill stood some pots of rare flowers, and I needed not the pencilled list behind the shutter, giving the dates of each gift, to know that they came from him. I looked at all these things silently, never asking a question, but finding them out for myself. I slept in Alice's room, and I let plants in the window die one by one for want of water. I never took a spray from the mignonette border, and if Dr. Spencer brought me one, I always asked in a laughing tone where he had gathered it, and if it came from the obnoxious bed I tore it up, or flung it away, when I was alone. During the three years I stayed with Mrs. Spencer, I never once touched the tree on which those initials were carved; and when the winter came I stood before the mignonette border, and watched Alice's name shrivelling, dying, perishing, with a superstitious pleasure that ran cruelly through my blood. Avoiding all questions, I nevertheless elicited a thousand particulars from Mrs. Weston respecting Alice. Soon I could read her disposition in all its gayety, its carelessness, its easy cleverness, its indolent talent, its half selfish, half generous lavishness of love on all around her—a love which she forgot the moment they were gone, but which remained with them like a root of bitterness—and particularly I could see the charm of her presence lingering in the house, and in the hearts of those who had come under her spell. I knew that in her keeping was treasured up all the affection my mother was capable of feeling, and that no word of kindness, no thought of love ever fell to my share. She had stolen all—*all*. And I knew—only I would not know it, lest I should hate her too madly—that my father cared for her also, but I comforted myself by saying it was but a little, because his tone trembled and his look

turned wistfully to me when he spoke her name.

And all things in this house breathed of her—books, birds, music, flowers. Stephen had sown her name in mignonette, and carved it on the tree, and written the list of her plants on the shutters, and measured her height against the wall, and marked the date and her age—the same as mine, but the stature how different!—in pencil, and signed it with his initials. And on the little trellised high window in the summer-house were verses—silly verses praising her beauty—written with a diamond. I laughed at them as I stood on the bench to read them, yet I wetted my pillow with tears that night.

I cannot help it if I hated Alice; the hate grew upon me, and I never knew its intensity till time tried it, and showed it to me in its fruit.

Surely I have spoken enough now of my mind and moods of thought, and you can fancy all that was working within as I carry you on through the outward events of my life.

I was not unmindful of my mother's strange words respecting my troubled sleep. I had a great fear of this, and every night I locked my door carefully, and bolted the door which opened between Jennifer's chamber and mine. I had no mind that even she should hear me rambling of Paul Polwhele, or of any other secret thought tormenting me.

I heard often from my father and from Miss Admonitia, never from my mother or from Miss Mildred, and yet I somehow felt the latter loved me. In no letter of my father's did he ever mention Stephen Tremaine, but I read of him at times in the *Gazette*, where his name began to take a hero's measure. Proudly, too, and with tears, I often read my father's name among the foremost in honor. Excepting anxiety for him, my life at Mrs. Spencer's glided on calm and placid as a summer day. I had every instruction that the best masters could give. A French *émigré* taught me his language; another, a skilful artist, gave me lessons in drawing. I became fond of painting, and learned to limn a likeness with a rapid but correct hand. I was a wild caricaturist at the same time, and my pencil sometimes shocked Mrs. Spencer by its vagaries, yet she never saw my wildest flights, in which I indulged in the grotesque and terrible till my own fancies at times appalled and haunted me.

I look back to the first year of my stay at Mrs. Spencer's as the happiest of my life. If there was any alloy in my happiness the fault was mine. I sowed jealousy and I reaped disquiet, yet even this, though it might gnaw at times, could not always disturb the tranquil sea of my peace. To be haunted by no secrets and no terrors—to

find ever a soothing voice and a caressing hand ready to help, to comfort, to encourage—to have every difficulty made plain, every effort rewarded—to be constantly thought of, and tenderly cared for—this was my life. And pleasures were sprinkled on my path plentifully—joyful excursions amid the beautiful scenery, rides, drives, walks. And then our evenings—I break off—I cannot tell of all these things. They are gone now, gone forever; the dear hand is cold that gave them, and I, so ungrateful then, raise streaming eyes to heaven now, and cry aloud to God for a blessing on him.

Ah! there is always something in this world amiss, and when we unriddle it let us trust that God will have mercy on our blindness and our mistakes.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

I HAD been a year at Mrs. Spencer's when one day the doctor, laughing, made me come to him, and have my height measured. He had measured it the day after my arrival—not against a tree, not against a wall, but against his breast, holding his arm around me, and pressing my head there, bidding me mark the place where it rested. As he did this now and I, half blushing, hid my face on his shoulder, I found I had to bend my head to reach it.

"And when you came here a year ago, you could creep under my arm," he said, "and the dignity of reaching my shoulder seemed an impossible ambition. Ah! I thought my pale little flower would bloom and grow in my garden."

"You have been so good and kind," I whispered, still leaning my head on his shoulder, that he might not see the tears on my cheek, for the thought of the past year's happiness swept through my heart like a reproach, so conscious was I of feelings which could bear me no fruits of peace. Oh! how many among us nourish roots of bitterness poisoning life, and then accuse their Creator or rave against fate. Surely I was

"Vex'd with a morbid devil in my blood,  
 . . . And, commencing with myself,  
 I lost the sense that handles daily life—  
 That keeps us all in order more or less."

"Esther, my poor little birdie," said the doctor, trying to lift up my face, "what are you hiding from me now? I thought I had heard all your secrets."

"Not all," said I, clinging closer to him to hide my confusion. Alas! I was conscious that he knew none of them. Because in our daily walks and nightly chat-terings I had poured out my childish history to him—my unnatural loneliness at Treval, my wonder at seeing children at play,

my grim imaginings, my terrors, and all the anguish of my yearning for affection—he fancied he knew me. And yet I had never let any note of our talk vibrate too near the cave! discords within me. But how often in all this time the doctor's hand had touched the lock that shut them in, how often his voice had nearly uttered the cabalistic word that would have freed them, only I could tell. Yet I had resisted, and a year's kindness, a year's tender, watchful love, had failed to make me show these grim skeleton's to the only eye that could have exorcised them forever.

Ah! the true reason of my silence was that I forgot them in his presence. In our evening twitterings, chirping together of twenty pleasant things, lingering by rills of laughter, and bubbling talk, flashing into wit, could I stop to hate any one?

In a land of sunshine, every view glowing in the light, my soul steeped in summer warmth, my heart, my thoughts in his hand, led by him through fresh meads and pastures ever new, while every leaf he shook down upon my head and every flower he made to spring up at my feet breathed of him, and in breathing of him sprang into comfort, life, love—while all this was so, could the hunger and emptiness of Treval come near me? could the shadow of Paul Polwhele darken my sky? could the cold Miss Mildred creep like death upon me, and touch me with her terrible secret?

No! a thousand times no!

And in all this life and light, this clear, whole, sound health he gave me—this new way he found for my soul, bringing me out of the wilderness into the springs of Jordan—in this I find the secret of my silence. I had nothing to tell when he was by me, save that I was happy. Let me think it, else how can I forgive myself for sealing up my thoughts from him, and causing him pain and sorrow? Let me reiterate to my soul that in the full contentment of his presence all evil died. My hate for Alice Weston ceased to gnaw. The shadow of Paul fled away. The thought of Miss Mildred dwindled into quietness. Let me tell myself again how in the evenings, when I bounded down the stairs to meet him, every ruffle on my spirit was smoothed, my whole being flashed into a smile, and all I had to tell was told in a kiss—that I was glad, that I was one beaming joy from head to foot—this he told him, and he was content. Thus he thought he knew me, and I, the morbid secretiveness of whose nature time and his hand have healed—I, who so long ago laid bare Miss Mildred's secret, and watched the shadow of Paul go down into the sea—I weep now, not for these things, but for him, and the cruel deception of that thought.

Yes, as a gardener knows a watered

garden, fair and beautiful through his care, and forgets that without him it would be a waste, so Hubert Spencer knew me. He knew *his* Esther—the Esther that grew up like a flower beneath his fostering hand—the Esther of a thousand graces—all his—the Esther radiant with the charm of smile and song—all his—the Esther full of tenderness, care, watchfulness—all his—all his!

Oh, heaven! let me weep—let these dry and withered eyes find the relief of tears! I am old, and my brain is scorched, my heart is shrivelled—oh, give me tears lest I die!

See, they drop down, they find a way for themselves over wrinkled channels long arid; with a sob of thankfulness, I feel their refreshing dew softening my sorrow, and I cry in hope, "Oh, thank God, a little while and I shall see him again, in that land where all is forgiven! Oh, Hubert! Hubert!"

Can I help it, if, breaking off in my narrative, I look back thus with yearning eyes into that past time, so clear to me, so unformed, dim, and uncertain to you, built up as it is imperfectly to your sense by my poor words?

Ah! pardon me, I am old. You must pardon much in the aged, even as we pardon much in the young. It is we, not they, who see the shadow of the lean, thin hand which will some day clutch youth, and set him face to face with a visage like his own, but wrinkled like mine—care, and sorrow, and pain, my children, stamped on it, marring its beauty. He never set out on his journey with this face, but it is his now, and we, who saw the shadow of it come on his baby brow, we are very pitiful to the young—would they were so to us! but few are pitiful to the old, except the angels, and they know this face of pain is only a mask, which Death's hand shall take off gently, and lay down in the grave.

Was I not telling you what Hubert said to me before he went away? Before he went away! Ah, yes, my pen has reached the sore spot round which it strayed, not daring to gall it with a touch. He was going away, that is why he measured my height; that is why he looked and looked into my face as though he would have it grow into his eyes; that is why he called me "Birdie," and a thousand sweet names that fell upon my ear like a rill of music.

I cannot say I was sad when we parted; I never could be sad while he was still with me; it was when he was gone that I—no, I did not weep, it was Jennifer who cried so bitterly, and the echo of whose sobs reached me at night when the house was still. I never wept, but I lost something of *his* Esther every day, and the old Esther grew and grew, drying up my heart,

as she gained upon me step by step. It was Mr. Winterdale who took Hubert away. I had seen the letters come that had disquieted him, and lastly Mr. Winterdale himself arrived, vexing our bright parlor with his cold presence, and bustling his sister into a fussy fever of delight and pride. Once during his stay, entering the room hurriedly, I overheard these words: "There are ways in which a man can travel in spite of Bonaparte, and I tell you, Hubert, I have had sure word that the ruffian is at Munich." Then he stopped. "Good-morning, Miss Treganowen. Have you slept soundly?" But not waiting for my answer, he turned again to his nephew. "I hear he is too cautious to commit any act through which he can be laid hold of, so our sole chance is bribery; such a scoundrel is surely to be bought, and he must be, for without him we have no proof!"

Here he broke off, taking the doctor to the window, and continuing the conversation in a whisper; still I was certain I heard Miss Mildred's name, and I felt sure the dearest search of Mr. Winterdale's heart was still unfulfilled.

There was an uneasiness pervading our atmosphere during his stay which affected me painfully, shutting me up in a cold silence; the same influence weighed on the doctor with its leaden dullness, shadowing the sparkling stream of his talk, and turning our sunny evenings into winter.

I observed that my sound health appeared to annoy Mr. Winterdale. I had not before thought his hate to me so active, but it spoke out on this subject in snarling words and unkindness.

"You are grown," he said, in his hard, cold voice.

"And much improved," said his sister. "Esther is wonderfully well now."

"Too well—too well," grumbled her brother. "She is more interesting when she is ill. Get sickly and thin, Esther; I shall grow fond of you then."

I blushed scarlet, but made no attempt to answer him. The doctor came to my relief rather hotly, I fancied.

"No sickness shall ever touch Esther here," he said, "if I can help it." His tone was short and fierce, and I looked into his face surprised. "Moreover," he continued, and his eyes flashed, "it is cruel to make a child minister to so unholy a passion as revenge."

"Justice you mean," observed Mr. Winterdale, coldly. Then he kindled all of a sudden, his pale, stern face lighting up as with an inward fire. "You neglect the surest means within your power of righting your mother. Is her name and fame nothing to you? And is all your future to be sacrificed to a false sentiment of pity for a puny child?"

"Hold!" cried Dr. Spencer, hurriedly.

"I owe you so much," he continued, softening his tone, "that you cannot suppose ingratitude in my case possible; but there are things I will not bear even from you. Let us discuss this matter another time. Esther, birdie"—and he put his arm around me with infinite tenderness—"shall we go nutting in the woods with Jenifer? It would be a glorious way of spending this lovely day."

"Ah, yes, do go, Hubert," said Mrs. Spencer, kindly. "I'll put up some lunch for you in a basket."

"You are not vexed, mother, at my leaving you?" asked her son, holding out his hand to her.

I looked at the large, comely, smiling woman, and thought if she had any wrongs to redress they certainly sat very lightly on her.

We spent a merry time in the woods, and who was so happy as Jenifer when the doctor pelted her with nuts as she stood beneath the hazel bushes to gather up the shower his busy hand flung down?

It was a merry day, long remembered, long looked back upon wistfully, every word and circumstance garnered up by memory in a golden net of love. Yet then I knew not it was the echo of the coming farewell which trembled tenderly in every tone, and vibrated even in the laughter with which the doctor made us merry. He was resolved that his last day should be a happy one, and it was.

I know now through what sad thoughts, through what uncertain clouds of grief and pain. Dr. Spencer saw his duty clearly, and fulfilled it—to me most nobly, to others painfully, but nobly too. I know now through what a weight of sorrow he struggled that day to make my last remembrance of him cheerful, sunny, tender, like himself—and he succeeded.

On my return in the evening one thing disquieted me. Mr. Winterdale had visited my sitting-room, prying into my ways and habits with curious eyes and officious touch. I knew this without asking a question. The peculiar odor of the snuff he used pervaded the apartment; and if plainer proof was wanted it was here in grains of snuff upon my books, in grains of snuff dropped on Alice Weston's dead flowers, in snuff sprinkled by flicking fingers against the pencilled list of plants—I could almost see his laughter there with it, I thought—the odious, cold, clever, curiously searching man, how I hated him that day!

It was the morning after this that Dr. Spencer measured my height, and broke to me tenderly the fact of his departure. I have said I shed no tears; it was so utterly impossible to be sad while I could still see him. Sad! it was so impossible to be aught else but happy while he was by that I never thought of tears. And he fancied the parting was not very hard to the bird he had



tended; he could not tell that I was but a mirror receiving the image of his brightness, his joy, his goodness, and flashing it back upon him so vivid and life-like that he took it for my own.

Alas! when his sunny presence faded out of the mirror it was cold and dead. Yet during these few lingering hours of farewell my brightness of heart never left me. As well ask the earth to be cold while summer lingers, or the sky to be dark while the sun shines. I could not be sad.

Why tell all he did for me?—all the care and thoughtfulness reaching through months and years—every moment of his time given to some watchful care for me—the kind advice, the earnest encouragement, the tender thought—I leave it all unsaid.

Then came the hurried last moments, and with an anger I could scarcely suppress, I saw large Mrs. Spencer giving to her brother the placid tears, the lingering looks, and nameless tenderesses that should have been her son's. For bony Mr. Winterdale, the tears dropped slowly, decorously over her smooth cheeks, while her lips piously invoked a blessing on his wiry-haired head. Exasperated by her coldness, I lavished a warmer kindness in all my words when I spoke to Hubert Spencer; while Jenifer, I saw by her watery eyes, would have consented that minute to be metamorphosed into the roughest terrier that ever barked could she but have followed him.

"My good Jenifer," said the doctor, taking her hand kindly, "I rely on you to take care of my birdie. Remember your promise."

Jenifer tried to answer, but her speech broke into a sob, and, seizing the doctor's hand, she put it to her lips without a word. He seemed to take this action as a tacit reply.

"That's right, Jenifer," he said; "you will be Esther's sure friend, I know. God bless you, my birdie! I shall be home again so soon I will not say farewell."

I was in his arms, but scarce felt his kiss upon my cheek before he was gone. I never saw Mr. Winterdale, nor heard his adieu. One figure alone filled my sight, and when that left it, darkness fell upon me and a great chill and loneliness, shivering through which I crept up stairs silently, and, falling on my knees, I hid my face, and shut out all things from my blank, desolate heart, save emptiness and winter.

Jenifer's distracted sobs roused me.

"Jenifer," I said, softly, lifting a white tearless face from my arm, "why are you crying? He'll be back soon."

"Never, Miss Esther; he'll never come back to this wisht house; there's no one en et cares for him. His mother never took her eyes off her brother's face; her last words, her last looks were for him. And

you?—Oh! Miss Esther, how can 'ee go on so?"

"What am I doing, Jenifer?" I asked, hurriedly; as my face burned with a sudden flush.

"I don't know, Miss Esther. You seemed to me to be wrapped round about weth a shadow—a shadow hard and cold as a wall. What prison have 'ee built up for yourself. Miss Esther, that keeps your free sperrit from rushing forth to meet tha truest heart that ever beat in tha breast of man?"

I was conscious of a strange truth in these words. I felt there *was* something which held captive my free thoughts, and barred back the affection which, like a tide, would fain have swept through my soul.

"You are talking foolishly, Jenifer," I said. "Dr. Spencer never says any nonsense to me about hearts and darts like a sixpenny valentine. Moreover, I'm not quite sixteen."

"Et's my belief you're a hundred miss," said Jenifer, sententially, "more's tha pity. And when I said 'heart,' I didn't mean any thing like valentines. Ef aal tha valentines that aal tha fools ever writ wes turned into gould, they wedn't be wuth tha goodness and the love that Dr. Spencer means to you."

Again I felt Jenifer spoke truly, yet her words vexed me, not because some instinct already told me that for some strange reason all Mr. Spencer did had reference to me and my happiness—Mr. Winterdale might not know it, but I knew that for me he had stayed at Clifton, for me he was gone this journey—but her words irritated me because she appeared to think my devotion in return should be boundless, and I could not make it so unless I first shattered that glittering palace in the air which my imagination had built up.

The day came when I broke that shining fabric with my own hand; but I did it then freely, not because I was expected to do it, or owed love elsewhere as a duty.

O injudicious Jenifer! it was your fault it on that day, when my prayers, and blessings, and dearest thoughts should have followed the track of *his* chariot-wheels, with their whirling dust clouds I turned from the long line of road, gold-sprinkled by the falling leaves of autumn, which dropped mournfully in the October wind, to gaze wistfully down into an agate and jewelled box—Miss Mildred's gift—where reposed a handful of brown dust, once a chaplet of withered leaves.

Lifting my eyes, I caught my own face in a mirror, and my wistful look flashed into one of triumph. I closed the box and put my firm hand on it.

"Wait," I said, "and we shall see. Alice cannot have such a face as that."

Alas! I forgot who it was had made me beautiful.

## CHAPTER XL.

From the first year of my stay with Mrs. Spencer I had been in the habit of receiving many little mysterious gifts sent without name. At first I set these down to the doctor's kindness, but he denied them so earnestly that I was obliged to believe him. After his departure these gifts continued, and there was in them a wonderful divination or forestalling of my wishes, and a certain subtle, delicate comprehension of what would please, that caused me many a puzzled thought. My mother, I knew, cared too little of me to think of me thus; so after one sick hope that flashed through me with a faint warmth and then died, I gave up all idea of her being the secret donor. Yet I could fix on no other, for there were many reasons which made me reject all thought either of Miss Mildred or my father being the hidden fairy. At length, a few days after Dr. Spencer quitted us, a packet arrived for me which I fancied unravelled the mystery.

Drawings from the "Faerie Queene," exquisitely designed, and the cipher "S. T." combined with my cipher quaintly and fancifully mingled with the bowers and grotesque figures of the designs—this is what the packet contained, and I no longer doubted from whose hands the gifts came.

I did not stop to reflect that Stephen Tremaine was in the Spanish peninsula; these drawings and his initials outweighed the logic of time and distance, and I put this gift with the rest, with a glowing face and a trembling hand.

Jenifer had looked upon these mysterious presents from the first with a sort of uneasy anger, which burst forth on the arrival of the last packet into a perfect flame.

"You should oughter put the rubbish in the fire, Miss Esther," she said. "You be most sixteen, and that's too ould to be having presents sent, like ould Nick sends his brimstone, in disguise. There's powder and p'ison in 'em, I dessay, leastways there's imperance, which es wus. Maybe they come from thic ould fiddle-scraping daancing-maester, who looks like a shrimp upon stilts, or t'other ould pattie with the yellor and green faace, like a pumpkin turned sick, who teaches 'ee tha gibberish tha monkeys larned at tha Tower of Babil, when they tried to catch a tongue and couldn't. Maybe et's he trying to maake 'ee faal in love weth un."

As I only laughed, Jenifer grew more and more angry, till the sudden arrival of a letter put an instant end to our dispute.

"Marcy alive! et's from the doctor," cried Jenifer; "do 'ee read 'un out loud, Miss Esther, do 'ee now, co."

Thus entreated, I took the letter from her hand and did as she desired.

The doctor wrote from Treval. He had

seen Miss Admonitia and Miss Mildred, who was still paler and more fragile than of yore. She had asked many questions concerning me. He fancied she loved me; he might be wrong, but there was an expression on her white face when she spoke of me which had wrung his heart. He had also been to Treganowen, and seen Prudence White, who sent her love to me and Jenifer. She was lonely, and wishful that her master would come back from the war and brighten the old place with his presence; but as her mistress hated the Towers so much, she supposed that would never be till Miss Esther was a woman, which would be soon now. Then she asked how tall I was, and the doctor had touched his shoulder and said, "Her head comes above this," at which Prudence had laughed.

He had visited the garden, and gathered the last plum on the tree from which we had taken so many. And the fountain in the court was broken, the water gone, the basin dry and dust-choked, but the steward had promised him it should be repaired.

Tom Pengrath was quite a fine young man, but he still preferred whistling to thinking, and he still considered Miss Esther the "wonderfullest, wisest, and wishtest young lady in the 'varsal world." So the doctor had taken Tom for a servant, partly because he liked Tom's ways, and partly because it would be so pleasant to have some one with him who could talk about Esther—some one who had known her ever since, like a sea changeling, old and sorrowful beneath the waves, but on earth called a little child of six, the tide had floated her up to Treval.

"Good Lor'?" interrupted Jenifer, "take thic timnoodle with 'un! Why, there aren't more brains in Tom's head than there's meat en a blown egg!"

And Tom was content, bearing a grin on his countenance which lifted his eyebrows into his hair, and sent his hair into his hat, like stubble on end. He was busy now packing the doctor's portmanteau, daintily stowing boots on the top of shirt-frills which Jenifer's clever hand had arranged into waves of crisp, curling snow.

They would embark from Falmouth tomorrow for Portsmouth; thence they should travel by coach to Dover, where they would take the packet to Ostend, from which place he would write again.

This, with a thousand kind thoughts for me meandering through the pages like a river of silver sunshine, was the doctor's letter. Stay! here was a message for Jenifer in a postscript:

"Shake Jenifer's hand for me, Esther, my child, and tell her she lives in my mind always with your image as your friend, and every thought I waft towards England will bear something with it for her. Tell her I rely on her, and there is a trust in this reliance which I could not give if her heart

were not pure gold, and her nature true as a bell. I am trusting my life to her, Esther, and she knows it."

I looked up, to see Jenifer's eyes streaming with tears.

"He don't ask me fur my head, do 'ee, miss?" she sobbed; "because ef he do I'll cut 'un off, and send it to 'un en a brown-paper parcel myself? Oh!" she exclaimed, warming with her subject, "two year agone I wished to be his dog, but now it sime to me that would be poor service. I should like to be tha air he breathes, tha ground he trends on, tha roof that shelters him. I should like to be his great coat, Miss Esther, to wrap him about and keep him warm when the world was cold."

"And be hung on a peg, and forgotten all the summer, Jenifer?"

"Forgotten! and what's that, Miss Esther? Can I think sich a gentleman can be alwis reminding me? My joyes that he should ever want my head or my hand to do his bidding—that's my joy—and not en any reward he gives, though he gives plenty. To know that I'm sometimes en his mind, 'long with you, Miss Esther, who are tha apple of his eye, fills me up with thankfulness too big for words. I feel as ef a angel had carred me right up to tha sun, and dipped me en his shining light from head to foot, and steeped my heart en something warm and good that shines and shines till I'm all light."

With the doctor's letter on my lap, I listened half abstractedly, half amused.

"Poor Jenifer," said I, "I am afraid you are very much in love with Dr. Spencer."

"In love, miss? That's a lean way of putting it. Say I ain't any longer meself, but him—his shadder, his image—a something that esn't me and esn't him, but that catches anl he es, like a glass holds and gives back your face. Say my sperret es clean gone out of me, and hes es come en ets place, so that head, hand, heart only live to do his bidding."

"And what is this grand trust, Jenifer? What is it—his body being absent—that your head and hands, imbued with his spirit, are to do for him?"

"Take care of you, Miss Esther." And, to my surprise, Jenifer, clasping her hands, burst into tears. "And et's a wisht task. Oh, don't make it harder, Miss Esther, don't make me afeard to sleep by night or rest by day lest some harm should come to you. And please, miss, do 'ee burn they picturs this old yellor pumpkin has sent."

I soothed Jenifer as well as I could, and to bribe her quietness respecting the drawings, I promised that the door between her room and mine should be left open. The night after Mr. Winterdale's departure I had found the bolt broken, and I had begged Mrs. Spencer to get it repaired, but I agreed to forego this now, as Jenifer seemed so childishly bent on it.

About this time my mother quitted Bath to reside in London, coldly writing to me that she had not time to come and wish me good-by. She remarked that she should take a small house and try to live economically, as there was a great demand upon her money from a quarter I knew of—that person constantly writing from abroad, forcing her to send him large sums. And this was her reason for leaving Bath, as she could not alter her style of living there, where she had so many acquaintances. She would send me her address when she got to London.

This, however, she neglected to do, and for nearly two years I did not even know where she was. I bore this desertion without complaint, but it rankled in my heart and embittered it. As if, however, to compensate me for her cruel indifference, a pretty piping bullfinch was sent to me from the same unknown hand, as the initials "S. T." on the cage told me. I shed tears over the tiny songster's head. So deeply did the spirit of the gift imbue me with comfort, that I felt as though the wings of some great love shadowed me about, and the yearnings of the unknown donor seeking to console me sank into my soul like the rest of a deep sleep that fills us from head to foot.

In spite of the initials, I was now somewhat shaken in my belief that I owed these gifts to Stephen Tremaine. The bird I knew came from some one that loved me—I could *feel* this, not reason on it—and Sir Stephen did not love me. Then I remembered that Miss Mildred's second name was Salome, and I began to think hers might be the secret hand that comforted me.

My father's letters came regularly, ever full of affection and alive with the incident and the stir of war; but I say nothing of these, except that fears for his safety ever kept my mind at a straining tension of anxiety.

We all know what a period of England's history this was, and though the wave of battle never broke upon our own shore, it dragged into its vortex a full tide of English life, drowning the joy of many an English home in tears of blood.

The doctor's letters were many, too, though not regular, and they had an interest for me no other letters could have, breathing as they did a solicitude more felt than spoken, and a cheerfulness, a hopefulness, and expectancy with regard to me which rounded my indolent nature to exertion and bore me in triumph over many a difficulty.

Thus nearly two years slipped away, unstirred by the breath of the absent ones save as it reached us in these letters. Mr. Winterdale and Miss Admonitia were also our constant correspondents, and towards the end of this, my third year at Clifton, she began to remind me that the time was rapidly approaching when I must return to Treval.

Mr. Winterdale's letters I never saw, though I remarked, with the same vague surprise, that they were read by Mrs. Spencer with more eagerness than her son's.

I have little more to relate of these two years that bears on my story, except that Jenifer practised writing indefatigably, inking herself to the elbows—often to the eyes—with such untiring industry that, soon after the doctor's departure, she could accomplish the feat of writing a letter with tolerable ease.

I mention one thing more referring to myself. Perhaps I have omitted to say that, in spite of a great natural talent for music, its drudgery oppressed and perplexed me. Urged by Dr. Spencer, I endeavored to conquer this difficulty, my thoughts dwelling on my resolve with such intensity that a certain feverish restlessness pervaded my mind concerning it, in the midst of which I was startled to find that music too difficult for my fingers one day became suddenly easy to me the next; and so accustomed at last did I grow to this singular fact that I gained the habit of setting aside each new piece, saying, "I shall be able to play it to-morrow." Thus, with what appeared little effort, I became in these two years an accomplished musician. In other respects I think I may say I was clever, although after the doctor left us, the same fitfulness of mood, the same silent, shut-up manner returned upon me, though in a lesser degree, that had characterized my childhood. The truth is, I was still lonely; very lonely. Jenifer was my only companion, for between Mrs. Spencer and me, in spite of her unrelenting kindness, there was little real sympathy, and since her son's departure this had dwindled into mere kindness, so I was flung back upon myself, and but for my letters I should have surely relapsed into the melancholy, morbid Esther of Treval. Lately, too, Mrs. Spencer regarded me at times with that curious look of fear which I had observed in many eyes, even Jenifer's, and several new habits began to creep into her daily mode of life which surprised me. Especially she grew nervous, and had the key of the front door brought to her every night, being particularly careful to tell me that she hid it in a different place each evening. She also locked and double-locked her own door, and examined all the windows with careful eyes. She did this so often, glancing at me, that I began tremblingly to suspect that she had heard of Paul Polwhele, and believed I should let in a gang of thieves on her in the night.

Every day she became less and less my companion, evidently regarding me with a mingled feeling of dislike and fear. I saw this, and again the old shivering loneliness, the wistful, weird feelings that had tormented me of old, returned upon me finding my heart swept and garnished for them.

During the first year of our solitude I

hoped every month for Hubert Spencer's return, of which he spoke confidently; then he began to write with less hope, and at last, eighteen months after his departure, his letters ceased.

I grew moody and fretful under this silence, while Mrs. Spencer bore it with that placid patience peculiar to her. Large, calm, cold, she accepted this suspense with all the philosophy which substantial flesh invokes so easily to its aid. Poor Jenifer, on the contrary, grew thin and pale, her only consolation being to talk of the doctor and slumber incessantly, her grief apparently having endowed her with a singular propensity to drop asleep at all improper times and places. At length a letter from Mr. Winterdale gave us mournfully a glimpse of the truth. He had heard from a friend that his nephew was a prisoner of war, but under what circumstances, or why he was debarred from writing, we knew not.

In the shade of this new sadness I prepared to return to Treval. With what feelings, with what steady, burning determination of purpose, you who have read my history thus far can imagine.

## CHAPTER XLI.

"DEAR ESTHER," wrote my mother, "I am sorry I have not had time to correspond with you since I quitted Bath, but really I have been too worried—about things and people I don't want to mention in letters—and I'm quite altered. I've grown so thin and ugly I don't know myself when I look in the glass. I write now because your father has been so ridiculous as to order me to send a man servant to escort you down to that old dungeon at Treval, and he says you are to go post, which I shouldn't care about if he didn't tell me to send you the money, which I can't do. The truth is, he remitted me an order on his banker for a certain sum for you, and I've spent it—you can guess how. There now, you know it, and you can do what mischief you choose—not that I'm much afraid of your telling, for you've sense enough to know that it is as much for your interest as for mine to be silent. Of course I shall not send the servant, and you can go just as safely in the stage as you can in a postchaise. All you'll have to do is to tell your father you posted, and he'll be satisfied; or if you particularly care for posting, for the gentility of the thing, you can write to old Adder and Mildew, and get the money out of them; they'll send it fast enough. I have had money of them already under the pretence of wanting it for you, so if any thing is said about this by these two old skeletons you'll please to say you had it. Don't forget this: it's important, for if they knew I had cheated them I

should never get another penny, and you don't know how urgently I may want their help.

"You are to stop a week or two at Exeter, on your way down, with an aunt of mine—a little old frump who has taken it into her head she wants to see you; so without asking me she had the impudence to write and get those ancient mummies at Treval to consent to your visit, and *then* she writes and asks me, as if I had a voice in the matter, or cared one farthing whether you stopped with her or no! I warn you, however, that you must keep your wits about you in her presence; she's a regular pump, and she'll never stop till she gets something out of you. She believes a certain person died and was buried peaceably some hundred years ago, so if you do let out the contrary you'll please to take all the consequences on yourself, for I won't.

"I have nothing more to say, except that you may give my dearest love to Aunt Frump; she has saved up money, so be particular in making it dearest love, and you may invent any fibs in the civil line that you choose as coming from me to those anatomies at Treval. I wish they were dead, that's all the harm I wish them; and, little as I've been permitted to care for my own child, I really do wish you safe out of their clutches. If I had brought you up I expect you wouldn't be so much like Methuselah's grandmother as you are, nor yet such a dreadful witch of a child that it's enough to make one's hair stand on end only to look at you. I send you Aunt Priscilla's address. You must write and tell her what day she is to meet you at the arrival of the coach.

"Your affectionate mother,

"LUY TREGANOWEN.

"P. S.—Be particular when you write your father, in saying you have had the money he sent for your journey. I've told him so already, but it is safer for you to say it too. The stage-coach fare you must ask Mrs. Spencer for. She can put it down in the bill to the drawing-master, or somebody: it's easily arranged in that way."

I shed no tears over this letter—I was past that. I don't even know that I was shocked. I had fathomed my mother's mind long ago, only I remarked with bitter pain that its tone was lower than of old; a long course of deception and fear had so blinded her, that for her, truth now existed in no one's soul, and she thought it as easy a matter for Mrs. Spencer and myself to deceive as it was for her. She had not even the air of asking a favor, it was such an every-day commonplace thing to her what she desired us to do.

I resolved not to increase my father's humiliation in his wife by divulging any of this to him, and mentioning it to Mrs. Spencer was out of the question. I wrote to Miss

Mildred, candidly telling her the truth, but sparing my mother as much as possible, and I assured her I only feared to travel by the stage lest I should vex my father. In a week came, not an answer, but her man, Pryor, with a handsome new chariot—very different from the old landau—and a hundred guineas in a little packet. A month before she had sent a liberal sum to Mrs. Spencer, requesting it might be expended in a becoming and fashionable outfit for me, so this further generosity both touched and irritated me. I wanted nothing, so I spent only a few guineas in presents to the servants and the doctor's poor pensioners, whom he had bequeathed to me, and I put the rest away in my well-packed trunk.

Mrs. Spencer charged me with letters and numberless messages for her brother, which I was to deliver as soon as I reached Treval.

"If any news arrives of Hubert I'll let you know," she said carelessly.

Then we parted, not without tears, for I certainly owed her much, and I was leaving her house with many acquirements which her steady, methodical, motherly ways had materially helped me to gain. In one word I had found a *home* beneath her roof, and if I was now an accomplished woman I owed it to her and hers.

We performed our journey to Exeter without incident, and drove directly to my great-aunt's, Pryor evidently knowing the house. It was a lady's school of the very genteel order, the mansion standing in a highly respectable manner in its own grounds, carefully walled in from all beholders.

Two housemaids washed and polished to a shining red, like streaked apples, met us at the door and ushered me into a parlor, where a little old lady jerked herself up from an arm-chair like a Jack-in-the-box, and in the same bobbing manner as if she were pulled up and down by a string, came forward to meet me.

"So this is my sister Barbara's grandchild," said the old lady in a little squeaky, thin, metallic voice, exactly as a Jack-in-the-box might be supposed to speak if it could.

As I had never heard of my grandmother Barbara, I could only presume she was correct, and better informed as to my ancestry than myself.

"I am General Treganowen's daughter Esther," I answered, receiving the old lady's kiss.

"You are welcome, my dear. And who is this?"

"I'm Jenifer Penaluna, and I've took care of Miss Esther nearly five years, ever since she was thirteen, and master always likes me to sleep in the next room to hers. And Dr. Spencer said I was never to leave her out of my sight waun minute, so please show us our room, and let there be a door between," said Jenifer, all in one breath.

Miss Priscilla Polwhele bobbed up and down with three quick little jerks while Jenifer was speaking, and then, as if perfectly satisfied, she got into her box—the arm-chair—and shut herself in with a little mahogany bar which ran across from elbow to elbow, and seemed indispensable to her Jack-in-the-boxish comfort.

"Show Miss Treganowen her room," she said to the shining servants, "and let a bed be put up in the closet next it for this young woman. My dear, I suppose Miss Tremaine's carriage and servant will return to Treval?"

"I think Miss Mildred wishes Pryor to remain here with the carriage till I go, aunt."

Never having known what it was to have relations, the unworded word dropped timidly from my lips. Miss Priscilla noticed it, and gave such a high jerk in her box that but for the bar I verily believe she must have popped out of it altogether.

"Let me see Miss Tremaine's servant."

In a moment Pryor stood at the door.

"What are your orders, please, from your mistresses?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"I am to stay at the London inn with the carriage till Miss Esther leaves, ma'am, and I am to hire horses and drive round every day to take her out wherever she pleases to go."

"Very proper—very proper indeed," responded Miss Priscilla, with two tremendous jerks of satisfaction. Her thin face, her hooked nose, her little frizzed yellow wig, and her long waist—for she was dressed in the style of my grandmother—made such a queer figure that I could scarcely refrain from laughing.

She was evidently highly delighted at having so important a person as myself to show to her young lady boarders as her grand-niece, for she paraded me in triumph over the house, presenting me to more girls and women than I had ever seen before in my life.

As I gazed at the loud, fagged, lean teachers, and glanced at the long line of girl faces, all looking more or less uncomfortable and hungry, and then turned my eyes on a formidable array of blackboards, dumb-bells, and stocks, I shuddered, and remembered thankfully that if none of my young life had been crushed out of me in this heavy atmosphere, I certainly owed it to Dr. Spencer. If I had been lonely I had been free, and my frame had never been tortured or distorted by any diabolical contrivances such as I saw here. Young ladies of the present day little think what miseries were inflicted on their grandmothers under the name of education.

My aunt and I dined in state alone, but after the first day or two I ventured to request the company of two of the girls, and in this way I ran Miss Priscilla's good dinners through the whole of the hungry school.

It surprised me to see with what perfect conscientiousness and placid piety she considered stale bread, milk-and-water, and tough meat—and very little of it—proper and sufficient food for her pupils and teachers, while, *vice versa*, noting was to good for herself. Nevertheless, Miss Priscilla and I got on very well together, she measuring me by the boarding-school measure that fitted all her young ladies, while I should as soon have thought of anatomizing my living body for her satisfaction, as of letting her see any thing that was in my mind. Still she complacently considered she was learning to know me, though, with sundry little jerks, she would sometimes stop uneasily in her supposition as to my character, and begin a series of questions in as circumspect a manner as her awe of Treganowen Towers, her respect for the Misses Tremaine of Treval, and her reverence for Pryor and the carriage would permit her to do.

"So you positively knew nothing of your mother's family, my dear, till you knew me?"

"No, aunt."

"And you never heard any one mention your grandmother Barbara?"

"Never."

"Very odd, isn't it? Here's her picture, my dear"—taking an old-fashioned miniature from her neck, which opened with a snap like the bark of a cur. "You see she was very handsome."

Grandmother Barbara certainly was very handsome, and did full justice to her beauty as I handed back the picture.

The little Jack-in-the-box sighed deeply, and jerked herself up twice very high, as if anxious to be questioned.

"And what relation was my grandmother to you, aunt?"

"Bless the child! Why, my sister, to be sure."

"I thought mamma was your brother's daughter, else how was her name Polwhele?"

Miss Priscilla nearly jerked herself out of her chair at this remark; then subsiding into it, and collapsing into the smallest possible space, she laid her skinny forefinger on my arm.

"Esther, my dear, it is a sad story, and there's a mystery in it never cleared up, but I'll tell you Barbara's history as far as I know it. In fact, Miss Mildred wishes me to tell you. She is too proud to speak of such things herself. She is a noble lady; she bought the good-will of this house for me, and furnished it. Let me see, there are six four-post—"

"But about Grandmother Barbara, aunt?"

"My dear, did you ever hear of my brother, Dr. Polwhele?"

"The uncle with whom my mother lived before her marriage? Yes, I have heard of him, but Prudence White said he was not a

doctor, but a chemist and druggist, and he kept a little shop at Penrhyn."

"Hush, my dear! please don't repeat any insolence of Prudence White's here among the young ladies. I always physic them from my brother's old prescriptions, and they would lose all respect for him if they heard such a tale; perhaps they'd even refuse to take his draughts, and that would be a great loss to me, for I still have a lot of drugs from the dispensary."

My aunt made a very high jerk at the word, which caused me a smile, as a few days' acquaintance with her had shown me that every genteel falsehood was accompanied by a jerk more or less high according to the magnitude of the fib.

"Dr. Polwhele, my dear Esther, was a highly-respectable man. He drove a yellow gig when he retired from"—jerk—"his profession, and always wore buckles in his shoes. He was a great deal older than Barbara and I, and when we were left orphans, he brought us up, and kindly too. He was very fond of Barbara, she was so pretty, and fancying he could do better for us in London, we left Cornwall, and went up by the van—it was very genteel to travel by van then, so you needn't feel hurt about it, Esther. But we had hard times in London, and were right glad when a friend came to our aid. He was Cornish, he said, and with a pleasant smile, and the old motto 'One and All,' he overruled every hesitation on my brother's part in accepting his benefits. But, my dear, it was false help, false kindness; my sister Barbara ran away with him, and we never saw her pretty face again. All inquiries failed to elicit any thing, save that he had given us a false name; and so well had he taken his wicked measures that we never discovered his real one. My brother was a proud man; he quitted his"—jerk—"practice in London, and returned with me to Cornwall, and set up at Penrhyn"—jerk—"as a surgeon. Our life was such a hard struggle at first that I deemed it my duty not to be a burden to him, the more especially as we quarrelled rather about Barbara. I wasn't pretty at all, my dear, and I was horribly disgusted with Barbara, and he was always wasting money in inquiries and endeavors to get her back—a proceeding. I didn't approve of. So we parted, and I went out as"—jerk—"a finishing governess."

Poor Miss Priscilla! I learned afterwards that she honestly and honorably earned her living as a lady's maid, an occupation which made her inexpressibly genteel, and fitted her for success in her future profession, nothing beguiling the parental heart like her high testimonials for ultra gentility and acquaintance with the aristocracy.

"Well, my dear, years passed on, and meanwhile a lady"—jerk—"whose daughter I had educated—the Countess of Phlunkey-

ville—died, and left me a little money, and I was living at Penrhyn keeping house for my brother, when who should call one day to see us but Miss Mildred Tremaine, with four horses, and her coachman in a wig."

I sighed so deeply at this point that Miss Priscilla, in a fright, jerked herself up violently, and but for the bar that held her in, she would certainly have fallen out of her chair in a stiff Jack-in-the-box attitude on the hearth-rug.

"Sighing is very bad for young ladies. I'll give you something to-night, my dear, which my brother highly recommended in such cases. Well, Miss Mildred asked to see my brother, and of course he was highly flattered, and tearing off his apr"—jerk—"Turkish dressing-gown, he put on a coat, and retired into our back drawing-room with her. And what do you think she had come about? She had found Barbara! she had!—Miss Mildred! who we thought had never heard of Barbara in her life! She had found her out, or rather she had found her grave and her children. She had two, a boy and a girl, but the boy was dead, and the girl, who was years and years younger than her brother, was living very wretchedly in a garret in Plymouth. You needn't be at all hurt, Esther. I've heard it is quite a genteel thing lately to live in a garret; so many of the German princes and emigrants over here have preferred garrets to first floors that attics are quite fashionable. Not that you need mention this fact about your mother at a dinner-party or in general society, and I would rather you did not name it to the young ladies; I already have some difficulty in making them take my brother's draughts. I had a good many drugs on my hands twenty years ago, but I've gradually disposed of them to parents in this manner, and I must confess, Esther, I don't want to lose the rest of the stock through a want of respect on the part of pupils for my family. Well, to go on with my story. Poor Barbara had died miserably in abject poverty, and my brother cried—positively cried—Esther, when he heard it. So Miss Mildred found it an easy task, working on his weakness, to persuade him to take Barbara's girl, and give her a name and a home. I very properly objected to this course, but Miss Mildred has a winning way with her, and she induced me to consent to it. I came up here to live, and your mother took my place at Penrhyn. Lucy was a very pretty girl of about twenty, but she had been terribly neglected, and her education was sadly deficient in gentility. Nevertheless she was very sharp, and so close, that her uncle, with all his kindness, never won from her any details of her childish days. I dare say, Esther, you find her much the same now?"

"I have talked so little with her," said I,

sally. "But surely she could not have been so old as you say, she looks so young as ill."

"Lucy is a good deal older than she looks," said the old lady, complacently. "But knowing nothing of her childhood, it was hard for us to tell her age. She puts herself back full five years, I believe. My brother found out that Barbara's son had been a sad scamp, even a thief, I fear—you need not feel hurt, Esther, I've heard of very genteel people taking to the road, and Mr. Turpin, I believe, was quite a gentleman—so he made it a shiny-queer-noun—I learnt a little latin in the sho—"—a high jerk—"in the dispensary—that unless this rascal was really dead he wouldn't take Lucy. Well, Lucy assured him he was dead, and Miss Mildred said that unless she had felt certain of his death she would not have interested herself in Lucy; so it was all settled as I have said, and she took up her abode at Penrhyn. Then the Misses Tremaine visited her, which caused her to be well received by the people of the town, and as she was very sharp and quick to learn, she soon got on. And she drove about in the Treval carriage with Miss Admonitia, and often went with Miss Mildred to Treganowen Towers—which is the grandest place for miles and miles round—and there she showed her all the beautiful furniture, and pictures, and family plate, and jewels. And at last she asked her one day what she'd give to be mistress of it. And Lucy, naturally enough, said she'd give a good deal, and then and there Miss Mildred drove a bargain with her. If she married Colonel Treganowen and had children she was to give her eldest girl to Miss Mildred, to be hers absolutely, without interference or remonstrance. You are that child, Esther, and it is well for you that such a bargain was made, for you'll have an immense fortune, Treganowen will be yours; and if you marry as Miss Mildred wishes, I've no doubt you'll have Treval too."

"And if I don't marry as she chooses?" said I.

"Then you'll certainly lose Treval, and perhaps Treganowen as well, for your mother says Miss Mildred assuredly holds some power by which she can dispose of it in spite of your father's apparent rights."

An instinctive feeling told me this assertion must be true, but a natural repugnance to converse on a subject so irritating and painful to my father kept me silent.

"It was an unnatural and wicked thing," said I, abruptly, "to part with a child for the sake of making a rich marriage."

"Well, so it was, but Lucy was very sally situated. My brother was just dead, and his little annuity died with him; she had no home. My strict principles would not permit me to offer her one here; not knowing how she had been brought up, I

couldn't answer for her gentility to parents, and I had positively two baronets' daughters in the house then, so the idea of her coming here was out of the question. I suspect, too—close as Lucy is—that at that time she had some other trouble—some low friend connected with her childhood was threatening or frightening her, and going to India seemed to her like escaping to paradise. So she was glad enough to agree to Miss Mildred's terms. It is my belief, even if she ever hesitated at all, every scruple vanished directly she set her eyes on the lovely silks and satins, and heaps of fine things that Miss Mildred had down from London for her outfit. She went out to Calcutta with a lady and gentleman whom the colonel knew well, and it was at their house he met her and fell in love with her, at least, I suppose he did, for at all events he married her, and very soon, too, after she landed."

What a strange influence Miss Mildred must have possessed over my father to bring about such a marriage! A poor girl, worse than fatherless, the daughter of an outcast mother, the sister of a robber, her mind debased, her heart hardened, the wretched experiences of misery her only education—and this was my mother! I closed my eyes in sick pain and fear. Such a tangled web lay coiled about me that I felt powerless. I cannot move, I thought, without striking, perchance, my father or my mother; bound hand and foot, we lie at Miss Mildred's mercy. But my spirit revolted at this idea, and the resolve that had burned in my heart so long blazed up furiously, through the momentary quailing of my courage.

"Wait," I said to myself. "Let me get to Treval, and it shall not be long before I have Miss Mildred at my mercy, and when my day comes—"

My face flushed, my hands trembled, and even my imagination, wild as it was, refused to paint what the result might be.

"At all events," I said, shrinking from my other thoughts, "she shall not dispose of me as she pleases. I will not marry Sir Stephen Tremaine."

Then I reflected that it was highly probable he might give himself the pleasure of rejecting me first, and this idea galled me as it did when I wept beneath the old ash-root. I looked up, and caught Miss Priscilla's pale green eyes fixed on me with intense curiosity.

"Do you think, my dear," she said, smiling at me like an amiable Jack-in-the-box, as she was, "that Miss Mildred may not possibly have already fixed upon some one for you?"

"Miss Mildred has never taken me into her confidence, aunt," I responded.

"Ah, well," and Miss Priscilla shrank down very visible in her box, "because I was thinking, if you were not pre-engaged,



I would"—a courageous little jerk—"give a ball while you are here."

"How can I be engaged anywhere, aunt, when I have not a single acquaintance in Exeter?"

"I don't mean that kind of engagement, my dear. The fact is, a young friend of mine—young Mr. Buttercombe—perhaps you have remarked him at church, Esther; he wears glasses, has rather a fresh color, and sand—I mean light hair. A well-made young man, except, perhaps, his limbs, which are a trifle long and shaky, but they don't show in his pew; you must have noticed him, my dear."

I assured my aunt that her friend had completely escaped all remark from me.

"Well, my love, he has noticed you," said my aunt, letting the lid off herself, as it were, entirely, and jerking her little frame bolt upright. "And he is the very greatest match in all Devonshire; he is the only son of Sir Mannamead Buttercombe, of Mannamead Hall!"

And having imparted this astounding intelligence in the stiffest of all Jack-in-the-box attitudes, with her arms struck out, and every finger on end like little pistols, my aunt put the lid on herself slowly, and subsided gradually downwards.

"Is he?" said I, yawning drearily. "Well, I'll look at the greatest match in Devonshire the next chance I have."

"And shall I give the ball?"

"If you like, aunt."

"Perhaps," said Miss Priscilla, reflectively, "you prefer a quiet party—just eight or ten nice people."

"As you please, aunt."

"Well, what do you say to my just asking him simply to tea?"

I laughed a little at the dimensions my aunt's ball had taken, but I acquiesced in her proposition very willingly, seeing which she was led into a further communication.

"The fact is, my dear, Mr. Buttercombe spoke to me in the cathedral-yard on Sunday, and begged for an introduction to you. 'Your niece is a most lovely lady, Miss Polwhele,' he said. And the poor young man was trembling so that I really thought his legs would have broken down under him. Then the baronet came up and shook hands with me most cordially; and in the course of a very pleasant chat, he asked incidentally if you were not the Miss Treganowen who was the heiress of Treganowen Towers. Then, on my saying yes, he beckoned to Lady Buttercombe—who really, Esther, hasn't done more than bow to me for the last three years, owing to a difference we had"—jerk—"about a pig. You see, I had Miss Buttercombe at that time, and I took out her education in pork and poultry, and so forth, and Lady B—— was too sharp for me; her bills doubled mine; I was obliged to give Miss B—— the measles and send her

home. I wouldn't have done it but for short weight; but when butter was two ounces short, and pigs were ten or twelve pounds less than bills said they were, I was obliged to have recourse to harsh measures. Lady B—— is a great farmer, and makes a deal of money by it. She sells her butter and milk, pork, mutton, wheat, hay, in fact, every thing to the hall, and the unfortunate Sir Mannamead pays for it, so all the house-keeping money goes into her ladyship's pocket. If I had *her* in the school, I'd have given her the small-pox, but as it was only Miss Melissa, measles squared our accounts mildly, and we bowed very politely to each other after I had sent in the doctor's bill. Well, I was going to tell you, she came up mighty graciously to me, saying what an age it was since we had met, and the next time she drove into Exeter she would certainly give me a call.

"My dear, we have been talking about Miss Polwhele's lovely niece, the heiress of I don't know how many Cornish Mines and manors, my love," said Sir Mannamead—"the young lady that this boy here"—and he gave his son such a poke with his umbrella, that, considering how shaky the young man is on his—a—a—supports, it's a mercy he didn't fall down—"has been staring at every Sunday, and every week-day, too, since he found out how often she goes to the daily service."

"Young Mr. Buttercomb blushed up scarlet, Esther, and I believe if he could have crept into a tomb he would have been thankful; then my lady, who seemed quite to forget the pig and the measles, said, smilingly—

"If we all come up in the afternoon, won't you give us a cup of tea, Miss Polwhele?"

"There, my dear that's the upshot of the matter, and—well, I rather think they'll be here to-morrow."

"And you told me this family history about my grandmother Barbara, and my uncle the highwayman in order that I might not behave too proudly to Mr. Buttercombe, eh, aunt?"

My aunt collapsed into her box at this question, and shut the lid on herself so tightly that it seemed scarcely possible she could jerk upwards again under half an hour; however, in less than that time she slowly opened one of her eyes, and looked at me sharply.

"You are a clever girl, Esther, and you are both right and wrong there. Miss Mildred gave me a hint to tell you all this. She hates your mother; if she could have had you grow up like a mushroom, without a mother, she would. It's my belief it would give her a fit to be obliged to conquer her pride, and name the Polwheles to you. Still, now you are old enough, you must be told these things, and she is glad to make use of my tongue to do it. And, to be sure,

I am always pleased to oblige Miss Mildred; she is very kind to me; she has just got me three new boarders—sisters—the Misses Behenna of Tywardreath, those tall girls who ate so much at dinner yesterday, Esther."

"Poor things!" said I. How they would bless me, I thought, if they knew that some of the coil that wraps me about has caught them like a lasso, and dragged them into this bondage!

"Poor things?" repeated Miss Priscilla. "My dear, they are very lucky things. It was a wonder I had a vacancy. I wouldn't have put the Miss Bolters and the Miss Colters to sleep three in a bed to oblige any lady but Miss Mildred."

## CHAPTER XLII.

THE morning after this conversation, as I was putting on my hat to go to the cathedral, the recollection of the amiable Mr. Buttercombe obtruded itself on my mind, and half-changed my resolve. Oh, how I wish it had wholly done so, and that I had not bent my steps thitherward in the rosy sunshine, blindly rushing on my fate, too scornful of my poor admirer to care how he interpreted my presence! A something jarred on my nerves that morning. I had borne Miss Priscilla's story of my grandmother Barbara apparently unmoved, but it had stung me, and I dreamt that night of her son Paul. It was this dream, I thought, which made me discover a likeness to him in a man who stood leaning against a pillar as I entered the cathedral. And when on rising from prayer I saw he had joined the scanty congregation and taken a seat in front of me, I still thought it was my dream which made me regard him with a secret terror as I fixed my gaze on his hideous bullet head, which bent itself in mock devotion within my touch.

Thus absorbed, I rose mechanically when the beautiful chant rang out into the nave, never heeding a gentleman who stood next me, till he politely handed me a psalm-book, then, turning to thank him, I saw—Sir Stephen Tremaine!

I knew him again instantly, and a deep flush covered my brow, but he evidently took this for the natural embarrassment of a girl, for there was no recognition in the gaze of intense admiration which shot from his eyes. As I had not permitted him to catch a glimpse of my face on the night we met on the road to Clifton, he had not really seen me since I sat under the ash-tree in the wintry avenue at Treganowen, and that was nearly five years ago, when I was a puny child of thirteen. With a throb of joy too deep to be mere vanity, I acknowledged to myself that no thought of that weird, witch-

like little figure would be likely to intrude on his mind in the presence of the tall, stately girl on whom he was now gazing. No one was more conscious than myself of the great change that had taken place in my appearance. Feeling sure, then, that recognition was impossible, I took at once the tone of a perfect stranger, accepting frankly Sir Stephen's politeness with that cold ease yet reserve of manner which women so well know how to assume. Nevertheless, inwardly I was fearfully agitated. For five years this man had made a part of my existence. What did it matter that I had thought of him unkindly? that he held possession of my thoughts was the great point gained, and this gave him his power. Dreams, hopes, plans—all the more dangerous to my peace from the fact that no one guessed them—had revolved all these years round his image. From the day, so long ago, when I read my father's letter to Miss Mildred, his shadow had haunted my imagination. Sometimes I fancied Miss Mildred had permitted me to read these fateful words, knowing well the effect they would have on my mind. The idea of a fixed fate, from which I could not flee, a destiny shadowed out from which there was no escape, would, she knew, impress my mystic-loving nature deeply. Henceforth this unknown figure, having no shape or form, would stand before me in awful distinctness as my Fate, and I should be repulsed and impelled towards it alternately, in all the trouble of that shifting sea of thought on whose waves rides Love. But when this figure took a shape in my mind, surrounded by its halo of beauty, its laughing insolence, its contempt for my weird ugliness, and its mocking refusal to have me thrust on its destiny, the excitement of battle was added to the idea of fate, and I accepted his defiance with a glow of rage and satisfaction. He had forgotten these things; he was a man out in the world, living his life, every branch and leaf quivering in the full sunlight of freedom; I was a woman out of the world, dreaming my life, not living it; not a branch, not a stem dared put forth bud or flower; all my vitality was hidden beneath the surface, like the sap in the strong, gnarled roots of the leafless tree. All the more did this suppressed life quiver and glow within me, like the smothered fire of a volcano; and in all the ignorance of youth I longed for the throe and the tempest through which it should burst into flame.

Thus, with all the shadows of my childhood looming down upon me, with all the words of his insolence ringing in my ears, with the presence of the unknown Alice twitting me, I stood next Sir Stephen Tremaine, holding the book that he held, while I felt in my heart that strange attraction and repulsion whose shifting changes precede passion.

Vainly I rebuked myself, and reminded my conscience in what place I stood. The sense of fate and the certainty that I had excited his admiration drew my furtive gaze again and again upon his face. I marked how five years of life—full life—had changed the handsome stripling into the man—the very man to win a woman. He had fought, he had been wounded, his name had passed from lip to lip, and something of the halo of the hero blinded my eyes as I gazed, while a thousand female demons of vanity and coquetry whispered that, brave as he was, I might, perhaps, teach him to be timid.

The service was over, but I scarcely knew it till I found myself going out with the throng. Then I felt ashamed to think that my worship had been as unreal as that of the man with the bullet head, whom my dream had invested with a likeness to Paul.

I was conscious that Sir Stephen Tremaine was following me; I felt his presence, though I dared not turn to ascertain the fact. I hurried on through the cathedral doors into the yard, but here a weak figure, faintly smiling beneath his glasses, presented himself before me, and held out a small note.

"Permit me to introduce myself," said the figure, in a thin, conceited voice. "I am Mr. Buttercombe. I have had the pleasure of calling at Stock House this morning, and was sorry not to find you at home."

I bowed, and waited for the rest of his speech. My aunt's description had rendered it easy to recognize this long, lathy young gentleman, who, from his general milky yellowness of hair and complexion, was not unlike a pale canary in spectacles. His costume to his boots, coat excepted, being of sickly nankeen, greatly added to this resemblance, and I was obliged to look down in order to hide the smile in my eyes.

"Your aunt charged me to find you and give you this letter," said Mr. Buttercombe.

"Thank you," I said, taking it, and attempting to pass on; but my new acquaintance barred the way with a simper, his pale eyes looking like too curious specimens of the oyster tribe, preserved beneath glass cases.

"Had you not better read the letter," he said.

I looked round, and saw Sir Stephen Tremaine feigning to examine the cathedral with great interest, while in reality he was watching this singular interview with curiosity. This circumstance added to my annoyance.

"I do not suppose the letter requires immediate perusal, sir," I rejoined in an icy tone.

"I beg your pardon," rejoined the gentleman, with a smile of superior intelligence, "I think it requires immediate attention.

Miss Polwhele impressed that fact on my mind with great care."

Utterly exasperated, and seeing at the same time that Sir Stephen, although not within hearing, had drawn nearer, I tore the note open, and read an urgent request that I would call at a certain milliner's in the High-street, with directions respecting a new cap, my aunt having nothing fit to wear in the evening before such high society as Sir Mannamead and his lady.

"Well, you find I am right," simpered Mr. Buttercombe; "the note is very important, is it not? I know all about it, you see. Allow me to escort you."

He hooked out his arm like an angular stake, expecting me to take it, but I felt the fin of a flabby-fish would be less repugnant to my touch, so I feigned not to see this movement, and walked on composedly, but inwardly chafing.

What would Sir Stephen do if this buttercup were not here? Had he recognized me? Would he speak? It was impossible to tell, for the odious Buttercombe—I thought he looked like butter altogether—a long, thin pound, imprinted with a fool's head, and standing on end—continued to walk by my side, pouring his inanities into my ear. I did not know in the least what he said. My thoughts were down at Treganowen by the sea, in the wintry avenue, with the withered leaves dropping at my feet, and I heard again the voice of my dream, answering my demand that in all Miss Mildred desired concerning me she might be thwarted—

"Take thy wish, though it be evil, and watch over the dead like Mildred. In the garland is his name."

Yes, I would refuse to marry Sir Stephen, but he should not laugh at me with Alice—he should not scornfully reject me as he had boasted he would.

"Adorable creature," broke in Mr. Buttercombe. [In the early part of this century, when sickly sentiment was the fashion, butercups like this said, "Adorable creature"—they took that from the novels.] "Adorable creature," he said, in a voice unctuous with delight at his own eloquence, "how can you be so cruel as not to answer me?"

"Sir, it was simply because I did not hear you," I replied.

"Not hear me!" he exclaimed; "that's impossible; young ladies, if deaf to all else, always hear such speeches as those."

"If you will have the goodness to say it over again, Mr. Buttercombe, I will endeavor to answer you."

My tormentor blushed red at this; and, half smiling, I now compared him to a shrimp, boiled pale, walking on his hind-spindles, with eyes more goggle and further out of his head, than ever shrimps were yet.

"Excuse me," he said, drawing himself up with an attempt at dignity; "you ap-

point me too hard a task. I have not the courage."

Then, apparently thinking I should be quite crushed by this speech, he smiled benignly, and hastened to add some of his softest butter.

"A manly mind cannot harbor anger against one of the weaker sex. Lovely woman is privileged, beauty is always cruel. Miss Treganowen, I *will* say it again. You are the most charming, the most fascinating of your sex, and I am your humblest adorer."

This insincere and ridiculous speech, evidently taken from the weakest novel in the Exeter circulating garbage, completely upset my gravity, and my laughter rang out into the old street merrily, quite precluding all possibility of reply.

"I like silence better than ridicule," said Mr. Buttercombe, in an aggrieved tone. He said this with clasped hands, and a face of such affected agony that I could only laugh the more; whereupon he seized my hand, and placed it on his arm, triumphantly marching me along like the captive of his valiant bow and spear.

At this moment I looked up, and met the astonished gaze of Sir Stephen Tremaine. He had come from the cathedral by another road, and had certainly purposely chosen this way in order to confront us. In passing, he regarded me earnestly, as we look at a person whom we half recognize, then, with a glance at my shambling companion, by no means complimentary, and a slight raising of his hat to me, he passed on.

"Now, does he know me or not?" I cried mentally; and, irritated beyond endurance by the buttercup's absurdities, I snatched my hand from his arm, and permitted him to see something of my spirit in my eyes and voice.

"Mr. Buttercombe, allow me to wish you good-morning. Here is the milliner's. I shall remain here a long while. I am going to try on all the shop."

But no! it could never enter into that yellow head, fluttering there in the wind like a daffodil on a very shaky stem, that any young lady did not want him—him! Antony Amery Buttercombe, only son and heir of Sir Mannamead Buttercombe, of Mannamead Hall! Why, all the young ladies for miles around wanted him! So he only smiled inanely, and followed me into the shop, saying—

"I shall be so delighted to see you try on all the pretty things, that I really must give myself the pleasure of remaining."

And he remained, while I vainly strove to tire him out by putting on in succession every feathered turban, and hat, and bonnet the establishment contained. But he only went into equal raptures with the milliner, and really seemed more and more delighted

every time I turned my face towards him, and with mock gravity demanded his opinion. At length his evident admiration, and a certain change in his manner, made a sudden curiosity dart into my mind like a flash. I determined on a wicked experiment, which his provoking conduct to me that morning seemed quite to justify. He had dared to make love to me, *not feeling it*, only desiring my fortune. What girl could or would bear that? And he had inflicted his company on me this half hour in an ungentlemanly and pertinacious manner against my wish, so I resolved if possible to make him remember this half hour all his life long.

I changed my demeanor; I chatted and laughed till a bright color flushed my cheeks, and a bright light flashed in my eyes; then I turned from caps and bonnets to wreaths, and flowers, and veils, permitting the milliner to arrange and rearrange my hair as she pleased.

I instinctively knew that all buttercups adore black hair.

Poor Mr. Buttercombe! When my long black tresses fell to their whole luxuriant length, and the lady's dexterous fingers crowned them with a wreath of scarlet pomegranate, and turning, blushing, half ashamed, I asked him what he thought of me, he was speechless. His reading failed him entirely, and not a single sentence out of a novel would come to his help.

There was no difficulty in getting rid of him now. He obeyed my first hint with a meekness and alacrity which gave me the gratification of perceiving that he had forgotten my fortune altogether—that he didn't know, in fact, whether I had a penny. He only knew that I was beautiful, and that he himself was a miserable buttercup.

Perhaps you will think that all this was vile coquetry on my part, but if so you are mistaken: it was only *curiosity*. I was thinking of Stephen Tremaine all the while, and I simply wanted to test and gauge the power of my face. I wanted to know the limits of my new empire, that I might judge by this easy conquest, whether I could hope to win that more difficult battle, on which my mind was set. Maybe it was cruel and selfish to try experiments on a canary, but I was punished for it in the end, and suffered more than he did.

Left alone now, I gathered up my hair in that weariness and sickness of the heart that follow upon vanity, and, after paying for all the foolish things I felt obliged to purchase to repay the milliner for her time and trouble, I walked drearily away. I had lost all hope of seeing Sir Stephen Tremaine now, but being too full of thought and vexation to bear my aunt's presence just yet, I determined on taking a long walk beyond the old city.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

I NEEDED the quiet of the green fields, and the stillness of those long Devonshire lanes embowered in foliage, with hedges covered with dripping, drooping verdure; so crossing the bridge that spans the Exe, I bent my steps towards the meadows by the river-side. For some way I had companions in children playing on the banks, in women drawing water, in laborers cutting and binding faggots from the hedges, but at length, on entering a wood traversed by a footpath, I found myself utterly alone. And I was glad to be alone, for the sight of Sir Stephen Tremaine had filled my heart with conjecture and trouble. The stillness of the wood was beautiful to me; it was late autumn, and rarely even a bird disturbed with gentle rustle the crisp and changing leaf that fell softly on the moss as I passed. I walked on dreamily with a hushed step, and my mind gradually fell into a calmer state, as, losing the hot rush of vanity and trouble that had filled it in the city, it turned wistfully back to old days, old walks at Clifton, when Hubert Spencer, whose name to me was another word for peace, was ever by my side.

Softly, softly the leaves fell, and the shadows of the short day, lengthening on my path, crept quietly around me, when suddenly the stillness was broken by a sharp cry. I looked around greatly startled, but no living creature was in sight. What, then, was the meaning of this sound? As if to answer me it came again, but, standing still as I was now, I heard it more distinctly.

"Help! help!"

I have told you I was no coward, though my nervous temperament often made me appear like one; so now it only cost me a moment's hesitation ere I hastened in the direction of the cry. Slight as I was, and dressed as I was in the scanty fashion of the day, I crept through the wood noiseless as a hare. I never stopped to consider what the cry might be, but sped on swiftly, till, when I least expected it, I suddenly reached the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and found myself in the presence of two men—one lying on the ground senseless, the other leaning over him rifling his pockets.

I had never anticipated such a sight as this. Two urchins quarrelling, a girl frightened by a stray horse or cow—this if any thing, was all that had passed through my thought, and now, struck with horror, I leaned for a moment, faint and terrified, against a tree. The robber, intent on plunder, had neither seen nor heard my arrival, but at this instant, in rising from his stooping posture, his evil eyes met mine full in the face, as my slight figure, like a spirit, stood confronting him.

His face blanched to a ghastly pallor, his lips shook visibly. "Alicia!" he muttered

in a strange, unnatural whisper. Then he drew a pistol from his breast, and pointed it towards me with trembling finger.

"Paul Polwhele," said I—for I knew him—"put down your murderous hand! I am Esther Treganowen."

"Curse you!" answered the ruffian; "it's you who have led me into this business. Why didn't you see my sign in the cathedral? And why have you followed me here, like the blighting, blasting, withering ghost of the only creature I'm afraid of?"

"The moment I saw you pursuing your vocation," said I calmly, "I knew you, but it was not likely I should recognize you in a church. I saw no sign you may have made there, neither have I followed you here. What do you mean by saying I have brought you into this crime?"

"I wanted money," he answered sullenly, "and I couldn't wait to ask you for it. When I saw you turn into a finery shop with a popinjay, I knew I might stand for hours in the street in vain. Do you suppose, because I am a miserable devil, that therefore I am never hungry, nor thirsty, nor tired, nor cold? I tell you I am so famished that I dodged this fine bird into the wood, and gave him a pat on the head, a little too hard, I fear. Why," he continued, turning on me with a fearful oath, "didn't you see me when I beckoned to you in that old building? You might have saved me from this."

I shuddered at his words, I shuddered at his presence, but my terror of him was not like the terror of my childish days, and in my anxiety for his victim I ventured to draw a step nearer.

"I am sorry for you," said I, "and you are welcome to what money I have. God grant you have not killed the man!"

I came forward now, and looked at him with a sick anguish of fear and compassion. He was lying with his face on the grass, hidden from my view, and his figure appeared so motionless and dead that my horror increased every instant, in spite of the necessity I felt of dominating over my ruffian uncle by calmness and courage. My feverish anxiety to render the poor sufferer some assistance helped also to banish cowardice.

"Miserable man!" I cried, "go instantly and get some aid for this gentleman, whom you have nearly murdered."

"Look here," answered Paul, as he stooped down anxiously, "a crack on the head doesn't kill a man; he is only senseless; you needn't talk about murder. Have you got some salts or other female fidgets with you? If so, you can stay and attend to him if you like, but as for me, I must cut it sharp. Where can I see you this evening?"

"Nowhere," said I, firmly, "unless you

return this gentleman's purse to his pocket. In that case here is mine, and I will give you more money to-night, at eleven, in the bower at the end of Miss Polwhele's garden."

Paul Polwhele looked at me irresolutely for a moment, then he flung a heavy pocket-book and purse on the grass, and picked up mine, which I had placed on the ground, that he might not touch my hand.

"Now go for help!" I cried excitedly, as I once more stooped over the prostrate figure on the grass.

"I go for help!" said Paul. "Do you think I'm mad? And leave him alone; don't put a finger on him till I'm out of sight; a touch would bring him to his senses now. Do you want to put a halter round my neck?"

In intense disgust, indignation, horror, I watched the ruffian slink away through the wood, then I knelt down by the wounded gentleman, and lifting his head gently—I confess in an agony of shrinking fear—I saw, pale and senseless, the features of Sir Stephen Tremaine.

"Stop!" I screamed after the robber, who was fast creeping away.

He obeyed me after a few moments' hesitation, returning in a slouching, reptile manner that truly made my blood run cold.

"This gentleman is not dead," said I, with pale lips, "but he wants instant help. Go, or if there is danger in your going, send to the London Inn, and order Miss Mildred's carriage and servants to come hither to me with all speed. Let them bring a surgeon with them. And now one word more. If you were not my own mother's brother, I would make this wood ring instantly with shrieks of murder, and I would denounce you to the first comer; as it is, I will screen you, if I can. But disobey my directions at your peril: you will know how to take care of your own safety. Go! the sight of you is driving me mad."

Paul Polwhele clenched his hands and looked at me in lowering hatred.

"Take care," he hissed between his teeth; "I could do you a worse turn, if I liked, than any you could do me."

Then, as I made no answer, he crept sullenly but quickly away, leaving me alone in the wood with the breathing but senseless form of the man around whom I had woven so many dreams, not one of which bore even a shadowy likeness to this strange and terrible reality.

In all the dramas and romances I had ever read, the hero had always performed prodigies of valor, overpowering the villain, and coming off victorious in spite of all odds. Here the hero lay with a broken head, very decidedly defeated by the villain, while, in spite of his captaincy and valor, he had also very lustily shouted for help; and the heroine, far from feeling her position of

succorer to be either romantic or pleasant, was painfully bewailing her near relationship to the scoundrel.

I cannot tell why it was that, as I knelt by Sir Stephen's side in the wood alone, my thoughts took this ridiculous turn. All my fear passed away, and a succession of ludicrous ideas visited my brain rapidly. I ridiculed him, I ridiculed myself, I drew mental caricatures without end, I quizzed my position unmercifully. Yet through it all, with that double power of thought we seem to possess, I watched him anxiously as he slowly came back to his senses: I dipped my handkerchief in the brook near, and applied it to his temples; and I wiped the blood from the cruel crack among his dark curls, which Paul's villainous blow had made. But as I did all this, every atom of the romantic fancy I had for him fled clear out of my brain. Had I divined then the secrets of woman's nature, I should have known, that this disdain of Sir Stephen's misfortune proved his image had never gained the stronghold of my heart. Love leans with watchful tenderness, with motherly pity, over not only the sorrows, but even the sins of the beloved one. Fancy requires her idol to be decked ever in his best tinsel, else she turns away disgusted, scornful or weary.

At length Sir Stephen slowly opened his eyes, and gazed round in a bewildered way. On seeing me standing at a little distance, blushing and confused—for my ridicule, my scorn, my self-possession vanished with the first twinkle of his eyelash—he essayed to spring to his feet, but faint and giddy, was fain to content himself by remaining seated on the grass.

"You had not better attempt to rise," said I, steadying my trembling voice; "you have been faint."

"I feel so still," he answered, as a slight flush suffused his face. "I remember now—a scoundrel attacked me here a moment ago. What has become of him?"

"It is many moments ago, and he is far out of sight by this time," I responded.

A still deeper flush covered Sir Stephen's brow.

"And did he run away after robbing me? And how came you here? Pray explain what occurred."

It was my turn to flush deeply now. How could I answer him? how tell a word of the truth? Sin, like the plague, spreads its infection all round, and, touched by Paul's crime, I shrank within myself as I felt I must prevaricate or conceal all my part in this matter. Could I say, "I am the robber's niece, and I will not betray him?" My blood tingled as I thought of this shameful kinship, and perhaps some touch of scorn or contempt (I meant it for myself) rang out in my voice as I answered—

"I heard cries for help—I was walking at

a little distance from this spot—I ran hither, and found you lying on the ground senseless.”

Sir Stephen's cheek grew hot and red at my tone.

“I had neither stick, nor pistol, nor other means of defence,” he said; “and when the ruffian attacked me I was so taken by surprise that I had not time to defend myself. I shouted, hoping the laborers in the fields beyond might hear me. Nevertheless, I gave the fellow a heavy blow before he drew forth his pistol and stunned me. And so when you ran up you found me lying here like a helpless simpleton?”

“You were lying there,” I answered, smiling, “and I don't see how you could avoid being helpless considering what a fearful blow you had received.”

“That's true, and I feel very giddy still. I suppose the thief made off the moment he had robbed me, otherwise you would have seen him?”

Again I blushed crimson, and Sir Stephen fixed his eyes on my face with evident wonder at my confusion. Still I was not bound to answer his questions.

“Are you sure you are robbed?” I asked, carelessly.

“He demanded my purse loudly enough, so I presume he took it after dealing me that butcherly blow. The scoundrel! I should like to meet with him again!” And Sir Stephen's eyes flashed fire and his hand clenched itself on the grass. “I should know the man again anywhere. I'll not leave Exeter till I have lodged him in jail.”

I felt myself turn pale, and my voice was a little faint as I remarked—

“You had better see if you have been robbed.”

Sir Stephen put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a morocco case.

“Thank goodness the fellow has not taken that!” he said softly. “My purse and pocket-book are gone,” he added aloud.

“Try the other pocket, Sir Stephen.”

“Ah, you know me!” he said, hurriedly. “I always keep my purse and book in this pocket—no! positively here they are in the other! Well, that is very singular! Could the robber have run away on hearing you approach? What a mercy he did not remain to see who my slight deliverer was! A young girl, helpless, alone, he might have murdered you! Really, young lady, I am deeply indebted to you, and at the same time I am sadly annoyed that you should have incurred danger and risk for the sake of a fellow who certainly ought to have been able to defend himself. Surely one gentleman should be a match for two thieves. I declare I would give the scamp my purse to have the pleasure of cracking his skull as he has cracked mine. And you know me?” he repeated, gazing at me very curiously. “I remember, and yet I do not remember

you. Stop! where have I had the pleasure of seeing you before?”

“You saw me in the cathedral this morning,” I answered, with a slight smile.

Sir Stephen still bent his eyes on me with the same earnest gaze.

“I remembered that,” he said. “five minutes ago, only I did not like to mention it, fearing that—that, in fact, I might have made myself disagreeable by looking at you a little more than— But, really you must, after all, be used to seeing people eager to look twice on your face after having seen it once.”

I made no reply to this compliment, but availed myself of my own silence to gather all my senses about me.

“It was not that,” continued Sir Stephen, “because even in the cathedral I was struck with the idea that I had seen you before. You appear to know me; will you not help me?” he concluded.

“Not in the least,” said I, bursting into a ringing laugh. “I doubt if you ever saw me in your life till we met in the cathedral.”

I said this feeling it to be true, for his eyes were full of jaundice and dislike when they fell mockingly on my face in the wintry avenue, and I had hidden it in the shadow when we met in the moonlit road going to Clifton.

As I laughed, Sir Stephen's eyes suddenly brightened.

“I have it!” he cried. “You are like, strangely like, a young lady I know. Look here! how singular!”

He opened the morocco case, and showed me the miniature of a young girl of about sixteen. As the smiling face flashed before my eyes, I no longer wondered at his exclamation. An instant before, as I had stood gayly laughing, it might have been counted almost a portrait of myself, but now as the blood mounted to cheek and temple in a full blaze of jealousy and anger, the likeness died away, or remained only as a mockery, showing a total dissimilarity in all things save some trick of shape and feature.

“Do you think me like this young lady?” I said, coldly.

“You were a moment ago.”

“That is scarcely possible,” I answered, carelessly. “How can I be like a person I have never seen in my life? Is she pretty?”

“Judge for yourself.” And he placed Alice Weston's portrait in my hand.

I strove hard to hide my agitation—my trembling fingers, my burning cheeks, my quivering lips, as I bent over the lovely face presented to my view, and felt the hot flood of old hatreds and jealousies rush like a fire to my heart. A little while ago, and I almost disdained Sir Stephen Tremaine, and counted his love a toy scarcely worth striving for; now it seemed again the greatest prize a woman could win.

With a curious shudder, half fear, half

superstition, I acknowledged to myself that Alice Weston's face bore a singular resemblance to my own, and I wondered if people born to mutual hate and injury wore always a faithful likeness one to the other.

I perceived with silent joy that my beauty did not suffer in comparison with Alice. The weird looks of my childhood arose from sickness, terror, solicitude; these removed, Nature restored to me the face she had originally given, and more, for the health, home, and happiness bestowed by Hubert Spencer had crowned me with a triple dower, and wealth of beauty with which the smiling prettiness of this picture could scarcely vie.

I returned the portrait with a proud smile, and lifting my eyes to Sir Stephen Tremaine's, permitting him to look for a moment at their full light, I said, carelessly—

"A very pretty, smiling little face. Is this lady your sister or cousin?"

With his gaze fixed earnestly on my face, Sir Stephen dropped the miniature into his pocket—carelessly I thought—and rising, said, hastily—

"She is not my sister or cousin."

"Your betrothed, perhaps?"

"My intended!" he exclaimed. "No, indeed? I wish I could show you a picture of my intended." And a grim smile passed over his face, followed by a sigh.

My hand beneath the folds of my mantle clenched itself involuntarily, and even my foot on the grass partook of the movement, yet, nerving all my courage, my voice scarcely trembled as I spoke.

"Is your intended wife, then, still more beautiful than that picture?" I said.

Sir Stephen burst into a laugh of derision, and then suddenly checked himself.

"I did not say I was engaged to marry any one, but certainly the person I was then thinking of was ugly as a witch when I last saw her. Really it makes me so uncomfortable to talk of her that I think we'll change the subject."

"You are quite right," I answered, laughing. "I am a perfect stranger to you, and I would not advise you to divulge all your secrets so frankly. Do you know I have learned a great deal already? You are engaged to some hideous old frump, whom you are mean enough to court for her money"—I could not help the flash in my eyes, that met his with a blaze of scorn—"and you are in love with a pretty and poor girl, whom you have not the courage to marry."

"You are mistaken—on my word and honor, you are mistaken!" exclaimed Sir Stephen, anxiously. "Why think so meanly of me?"

For some moments my quick ear had caught the rumble of a carriage, and, infinitely relieved by this approaching break

to an embarrassing interview, I was able to answer him with careless ease.

"It matters very little what I think of you, Sir Stephen, since, in all probability, we shall never meet again. I hear the carriage coming which I ordered to meet me here. I shall be very happy to lend it to you, if you will permit me; you are not in a fit plight to walk to Exeter, even if you were able, and you really need the aid of a surgeon—"

"To bind up my inglorious wound," he added, in a vexed tone. "You place me under infinite obligations. May I not at least know the name of the young lady to whom I owe so much?"

"No, indeed," I answered, quickly.

"But you appear to know *me*," he persisted.

"Is not your name marked on the handkerchief with which I bathed your forehead?" I asked, as I moved away a step or two.

"We cannot part like this!" he cried, following me eagerly. "Pray tell me your name. I must see you again."

"And why *must* you see me again?" I asked, turning towards him suddenly.

"To thank you," he answered, "for your courage and kindness. I fell among thieves, and have you not been my good Samaritan?"

"You owe me very little," said I, coldly.

"There was no need of courage where there was nothing to fear, and as for kindness, surely it is a very small thing to stand by a fainting man for a moment or two till he recovers."

"You have done more than that, as my handkerchief and your own testify," he responded.

"Well, what does it matter?" said I, moving rapidly away. "You will find the carriage at the entrance to the wood. Farewell, Sir Stephen."

"Oh, do listen to me," cried the young man. Then he broke into a little laugh, which fell musically on my ear, and changed his tone of entreaty for one of frank openness. "Let me confess it all," he said; "I am mortified to death. You hear me screaming for help, like a frightened school-boy, and you find me stretched under a tree with a broken head, like a simpleton who had neither sense nor courage to defend himself. Oh, my dear young lady, can any man's vanity stand such things? Let me, I entreat you, have an opportunity—"

"For showing me your fascinating and noble qualities," said I, laughing too.

The half-impertinent emphasis I placed on the words brought a flush to his handsome face; his vanity was irritated to the quick; and I believe from that moment he resolved to make me like him.

It was a dangerous resolve, but it is one which young gentlemen in their vanity are



very apt to make, forgetting that their destined victim may, in her turn, have made a resolve also—forgetting, in fact, that two can play equally at the noble game of heartless coquetry.

Ah! we, as others before us, both found this true—" *Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.* "

"You are half right," said Sir Stephen, as the flush died out of his cheek; "I am certainly anxious to win your good opinion. You owe me a chance for showing myself in a better light than that in which you have seen me to-day. You will permit me to call at your house? Have you a father? A mother? Do you live in Exeter?"

"Stop!" I cried, "you travel too fast. I do not live at Exeter. I am here on a visit."

"Where?" he exclaimed.

"You recollect that young gentleman walking with me to-day?" said I, uttering this at random, merely to gain time to think.

"That odious young Buttercombe! I was at college with him. Are you staying with his delectable mother?"

At this moment a weather-beaten, round, Devonshire face peered at us between the trees, and a voice shouted to me—

"If you please, miss, I can't bring the chaise up no nearer."

I ran towards the postillion ere Sir Stephen had time to detain me, and was rejoiced to find he was a stranger whom I had never seen before. I guessed at once that the fear of seeing Pryor had induced Paul to order a chaise at some other inn, and this was not Miss Mildred's carriage now awaiting me.

"Please, miss, where's the dead man?" said the postillion. "I s'pose me and Jim can carry 'un. The person as ordered the chaise said there'd bin a accident—a gentleman had hurt hisself out shooting, and a young lady was with 'un and we were to drive to this yur wood, and pick 'un up."

"It is all right," I answered; "but the gentleman is not dead; he is only hurt."

At this instant, Sir Stephen, looking pale and faint, joined us, and feeling really sorry, I walked by his side, listening to his profuse thanks, till we reached the chaise. A rapid glance showed me that the damp, limp man—who somehow gave me the idea of a green-grocer just dressed for a funeral—standing at the door was as strange to me as the postillion, and I was delighted that this happy chance aided my plot and precluded all possibility of Sir Stephen's discovering my name. He would have handed me into the chaise, but I drew back.

"I am going to walk to Exeter," I said.

"But the chaise is yours," he exclaimed, in great vexation. "You told me you had ordered it to meet you here; if, then, you object to going with me, it is for me to walk."

"You don't seem much fit for walking, sir," said the limp man.

A sudden faintness and giddiness with which Sir Stephen was seized prevented all further argument. He consented to ride, but he found me inflexible when, with all his eloquence, he would have induced me to accompany him. Such a drive would have been beyond my strength, and a single tear in his presence would lose me all chance of victory.

Sir Stephen gave me his hand, with an air of great chagrin, as he entered the chaise. "I complete the contempt you must feel for me," he said, "by my want of gallantry in forcing you to walk home, whilst I coolly take your carriage."

"Look at your condition," I answered, changing my bantering tone for one of softness; "you are faint and sick, and, moreover, you would frighten every one you met; your face and neckcloth are covered with blood."

"What a hideous object I must be!" he said, ruefully.

"Drive to a surgeon's at once," I replied, kindly.

"I wish there was any thing I could do to show the fairy who has succored me that I am grateful," said Sir Stephen, bending towards me, while the damp green-grocer respectfully stood aside.

A sharp, sudden thought of Paul brought a painful blush to my face.

"Do you not think," said I, in a low voice, "that the act of attacking you, and not taking your money, looks like insanity? These men believe you have met with an accident; why not let every one think so, and leave this poor desperate wretch alone?"

"You are anxious to save my reputation; you fancy I shall be laughed at if I confess I was not a match for a single thief. I will do any thing you wish as regards the man, except resist the temptation of shooting him the next time we meet; meanwhile he may go scot-free, since you seem to sympathize with him. Perhaps you even think he deserves a reward for knocking me on the head?"

My face burned like fire, but I answered in the same jesting tone—

"Not quite that, but if you will leave him alone till the shooting time you will oblige me."

"Certainly I will," he answered, with a look of slight surprise. "But I do not promise you to tell any stories of accident. My reputation is not so mean, I hope, but that I can afford to own I was knocked down by an unexpected blow from a ruffian. I shall confess all my loss of presence of mind, my broken head, my shouts for help, and all the rest of it, and if any one chooses to ridicule me, he will find I am not always a sort of 'Ethelred the Unready.'"

I had never liked Sir Stephen so well as I did when he said this. I gave him my hand again, and thanked him for yielding

to my "whim," as I called it, about the robber.

"I shall certainly see you again," he said, as the chaise drove off.

I watched it till it was out of sight; then, turning back into the wood, I flung myself on the moss in the loneliest spot I could find, and wept bitterly.

Those who know any thing of the human heart will guess the sources of my tears. They were all bitter, every one. By my mother and Paul they came through shame, mortification, and the anguish of pride and honor soiled and broken; by the unknown Alice they welled up through the hate and jealousy of long smouldering years; by Stephen they reached me passionately in anger, revenge for scorn, and a hot resolve to make him, at least, suffer for me what I had felt for him; and lastly, for myself they dropped down in the salt bitterness of diminished self-esteem, and if with these mingled warm drops of pity for my father, even they could scarcely soften the agony of contempt, the shrinking from myself, which I felt.

Was Paul to make me lie and steal for him, as he made my mother? and could even all my love and pity for my father justify me in such a course? Then I felt this was not a question of reason and expedience, or even of love and pity; it was simply a question of possibility. *Could* I do this?—would my nature let me do it? I answered *No* with all the force of my soul, and then, in my passionate misery, I flung the tears from my face, and beat and bruised my hand against the tree upon whose shadow I rested. Nevertheless, although I thus indignantly resolved not to pollute my lips with falsehood for Paul Polwhele, I was too dazzled by the glare of my own imagination to recede from the path I had entered on with regard to Stephen Tremaine. "All is fair in love and war," I murmured, blinding myself by a sophism; and in very truth I could not give up my plot. I had dreamed of this day for so many years; I could not let him, like a shadow, escape me now. If he had not shown me that he carried with him everywhere the hateful picture of that girl, whose phantom had haunted my jealous heart since childhood, why, then, perhaps—

Tears dropped down fast upon my thought, and broke the thread of it, and the evening dew, and many a yellow leaf, fluttering softly, fell on me ere I arose and walked slowly home.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

It was late when I returned; but I pass over all Miss Priscilla's wonder at my long absence, and all Jenifer's truer anxiety, and

I do not touch with one drop of ink that agreeable little tea-party in the evening, where all the butter-courses vied with each other in feeding me with butter and honey, and my poor admirer lost himself in depths of sentiment and romance, whence he emerged covered with confusion and yellow blushes, while his mother relieved her maternal heart by giving me a profusion of hard kisses, which really bruised my cheeks.

I leave all this untold to turn to my interview that night with Paul Polwhele.

Stock House was hushed in silence, when with stealthy step I descended the stairs, and found myself in front of the stout door leading into the grounds. But not all my strength sufficed to undo the great bars that stretched across it; so, baffled, heated, and nervous, I crept into the drawing-room, and after some further bruising of my slight fingers, I unbarred shutter and window, and leaving my candle behind a large screen, stepped out into the garden. This was the first time in my life that I found myself the sole waking inmate of a slumbering house. The deathly stillness had chilled me with awe, and the soft sound of my own footfall as I crept by the closed doors and sleepers sounded to my ears ghostly and strange. Added to this chill of solitude was the intense loathing I felt of my act, and now as I stepped out into the free air, my disgust and hatred towards the man for whom I was prowling through my aunt's house like a thief in the night, so overpowered me, that I stamped my foot on the ground, and clenched my hands together in a passion of indignation and shame. Then the thought that I was here by my own free will, and in furtherance of my own resolves, nerved me, and I walked on with a firm step towards the summer-house, hiding my figure from the face of the pale moon, behind shrubs and trees. Still my heart beat loudly as the tall, burly figure of a man stood suddenly in my path.

"You have kept me waiting," he growled, "till my patience turned to a devil within me. I believe I should have throttled you, if every atom of fire hadn't been drawn out of my blood by watching your white face coming creeping, creeping along like a corpse in the moonlight. Couldn't you walk faster, instead of gliding upon a man like a ghost?"

I led the way to the summer-house without answer, and flung myself on the bench. I was fearful Paul would place himself near me; but I was mistaken—he stood against the doorway, leaning his strong hand on the trellis surrounding the porch.

"Let us go to business at once," he said fiercely. "What money have you brought me?"

His words shook my nerves from head to foot, but I was not come hither to play the coward—I was come to seize the first clue that should lead me to Miss Mildred's

secret; and out of this thought I plucked courage.

"Paul Polwhele," I said, "the hateful tie of relationship between us gives you no claim upon me. I recognize no right of yours to demand any help from my hands. This morning I *purchased* that gentleman's purse from you with my own, and now I tell you plainly I will not give you a penny; you may murder me if you like, but on my table I have left a full description of you, with the particulars of our interview to-day, and my intention to meet you here to-night."

A rustle among the leaves on the trellis told me Paul was startled by my tone.

"I'm not going to murder you," he said gruffly, "but if you won't help me, why come here to meet a desperate man?"

"Because you may have something to sell which I wish to buy."

"Halloo!" exclaimed Paul, "I don't keep any jewelry or any other swag about me: I have nothing to sell you."

"You can sell me the secret of the red room at Treval."

My whisper passed through the night into his ear, and he staggered beneath it. In the moonlight I saw his hand tremble as he clung to the trellis for support.

"I know nothing of it," he said hoarsely—"there is no secret."

"Have you forgotten what you said to me at Bath? You told me to ask Miss Mildred for the secret, but I might as well ask the dead—she will never tell it."

Paul came forward a step, and laid his hand on the rustic table which stood between us.

"Ask the dead," he said; "the living will never tell you."

"Some one shall," I answered firmly. "Paul Polwhele, will you tell me this secret or not?"

"What do you want to do with it?" he asked evasively.

"That is my affair, not yours."

"You want to injure Miss Mildred; I'll never help you to do that. I have flung Lucy off a hundred times, when she has wheedled me to do her a mischief."

"And why do *you* befriend Miss Mildred?" I asked, surprised.

"Because she has never injured me; she knows things of me that would hang me any day, and she keeps silent."

I hesitated a moment, and then I resolved to risk even my life to gain my purpose.

"But I will not be silent," I said in a firm, low tone. "I will go to-morrow to the nearest justice, and tell him what I know of you. It is nothing to me that you are my mother's brother—I should be doing her good service if I got you hanged."

Paul Polwhele drew a long, heavy breath, and brought his face close to mine; his eyes gleamed with savage fury. "It is well for

you," he hissed, "that you have left that paper on your table. Who and what are you, girl?"

My heart stood still with fear, but I had resolved to play out a brave part, and I did it.

"I am a Treganowen," I said, steadying my voice to a tone of calm contempt. "Don't you know the proverb, 'Love is strong and hate is fierce, like a Treganowen?' I am not afraid of you, Paul Polwhele; you will have to tell me your secret now, not for money, but to save your neck from the halter."

"Esther Treganowen, you are my niece," said the robber, "and it is hard for a man to be talked to thus by his own blood."

A strange wild pathos rang out in his voice which touched me.

"I have no wish to injure you," I answered, "but I want you fully to understand that I am not to be robbed and held in subjection like my mother. This is our final interview, and you have received your last penny from me, since you refuse now to sell me the information I require."

"Stop!" said Paul softly, as I rose to leave. "How much money do you offer me?"

"I will give you fifty guineas," I replied.

"Have you got them with you?" he whispered greedily.

"I knew my uncle was a robber. I brought no money here with me."

He drew back his evil face, which had nearly touched mine, and bent it in silence on his hand for a full minute. When he raised it, pallid in the moonlight, there was an indescribable change in its expression.

"Esther," he said, "I cannot do it. I took a solemn oath never to reveal this secret."

"To Miss Mildred, I suppose?"

"No; to a woman who is dead—to Alicia Tremaine."

I was silent, but my heart beat audibly.

"Esther," he continued, "I was that unhappy woman's bitterest enemy: her miseries and her death she owed alike to me."

I shrank away from him with a chill of horror.

"I thought you were innocent of that crime," I murmured.

He scarcely appeared to hear me.

"Do not ask me to break my oath to the dead," he continued. "Ask me for my own history, and you will find in that a secret well worth your money. Listen, Esther—you are like Alicia Tremaine; had you been living with her ghost, or her son, or her mother, you could not have grown more like her. It is as if her shadow had passed over you and left some trace of itself on your face. But for this I should have struck you down twice to-night; no thought of Lucy held me back, but with that strange shadow of Alicia on you I was *afraid*."

My deadly terror almost paralyzed my

heart, but I hid it bravely, and answered in a light tone—

"I have not been living with Alicia's ghost; I have been with Mrs. Spencer and her son."

Paul struck his hand on the table with a heavy curse.

"That's it!" he said. "Is your father mad that he sends you there? I hope young Spencer will never come out of the Austrian prison where he languishes."

A burning flush covered my face, and I burst into a torrent of indignant words, but Paul interrupted me coolly.

"You do not understand what you are saying, but I know what I say and what I do. I met Hubert Spencer once as he was riding at night from Treganowen, and the moment I saw his face my pistol was pointed at his heart, but it went off too soon—I only wounded him."

I rose, sick with pain and fear.

"Stand aside, miserable assassin," I cried, "and let me pass you! I cannot remain another instant in your presence."

"Is that the way you thank me for shooting at Hubert Spencer?" asked Paul sullenly.

"Thank you?" I cried aghast.

"Yes; there is no man whom you have so much reason to wish dead as that man," he answered.

I paused in amazement, my whole soul recoiling at his words. I could not speak; renouncing my late purpose, my wish now was concentrated in the one desire to escape from the ruffian's presence.

"Let me pass!" I cried furiously.

I got by him, and should have fled up the garden, but one sentence from his lips arrested my flight, and rooted me to the spot as though he had power to turn me to stone.

"Hubert Spencer is your cousin," said Paul. "As I live, he is your mother's brother's son."

Struck with faintness, sickened, astonished by his words, I could only gasp forth—

"Your son!—is he yours?"

I trembled for his answer, and my blood retreating to my heart, left my face pale and cold as marble.

"Ah, my story is worth your fifty pounds now, isn't it?" said Paul sulkily. "It is my turn to make terms, I think; and my first condition is, that I have the money beforehand. Count it down at once, and I'll send you the story, all written out clean and fair, or else I'll meet you down at that thundering old dungeon Treval, and tell it there."

I strove with all my power to change his resolve, but I could not get a word more from him, so I was fain to give way and trust to his word, which he gave with a ruffian oath, that he would deal fairly with me.

"I am frozen," he said, in answer to my entreaties; "the cursed moon and your white face have chilled me to death; a gal-

lon of brandy would not give me the courage to tell the story now."

Yielding to his sullen will, seeing it useless to combat it further, I crept back to the house, and took my purse from its hiding-place. Then on the window-still I counted out fifty guineas, and beckoned to Paul to take them up.

"I am trusting to your word," said I quietly. "You see I believe there is some good in you still."

"My word is as good as yours," answered Paul. "I won't cheat you. If I were not a poor devil, without bread, bed, or roof-tree, I would say, 'Esther, Keep your money, and when I have told you my history, give me your cheek to kiss, and own that the same blood warms our veins;' that's all I'd ask of you, girl."

He dashed his hand across his eyes roughly, and sprang away without a word of farewell.

Moved in spite of myself, I fastened the shutters with a trembling hand, then reached my room noiselessly, and destroyed the papers I had left on my table, written that night while waiting for Jenifer's tardy slumbers. This done, I flung myself quickly into bed, and slept as if there was nothing else left me to do but sleep, sleep forever.

It was late when I awoke, and I found the house in strange confusion. The Miss Bolters and the Miss Colters, who slept three in a bed, had seen a ghost—a tall, pale creature in white, who glided by in sepulchral silence, but who certainly left rather a visible proof of her presence behind her, in the shape of a remarkable caricature of my aunt, Miss Priscilla Polwhele. Laughing at the whole story, I wondered at Jenifer's strong anger, as she snatched the drawing from the fattest Miss Bolter, and declared she had seen it a week ago in my portfolio, and the ghost was certainly some thief who had stolen it. Hearing this, I came forward, and although I had no recollection of having portrayed my aunt in such a ridiculous style, I was unwilling to let her feelings be hurt by a sight of the obnoxious likeness, so I tore it up, and begged the girls, as a favor, to say nothing about this wandering ghost-artist to Miss Priscilla. In a day I had forgotten this silly vision, arising from the uneasy Bolter and Colter slumbers, but I saw it rankled in Jenifer's mind, and she was anxious to leave Stock House.

"Aw! my dear Miss Esther," she said. "I'm wisht as a raven in this gashly ould place, and I reckon I shall be wus when I get down to Treval. I sheant have no health en my bones, nor no peace en my sperrit, till I see the doctor again, or leastways hears from 'un. I wish his bright eyes was here this minute. You've got something on your mind, Miss Esther, and one glint of his comforting faace would chase it away like the snaw before the sun."

Ah! poor Jenifer little thought there was a kind of horror fallen between me and Hubert now. The son of Paul Polwhele could never be to me again the dear friend he had been of old. Even my kindly remembrance of him in my heart was darkened by the assassin's image.

In the warm play of my imagination round Sir Stephen's figure the bright face of Hubert Spencer had often intruded like a reproach; this shadow was lifted from me now, and I felt free to follow my own fancies. The secret of our cousinship was doubtless always known to Hubert, and it accounted to me for all his kindness, his watchfulness, and affection. Nevertheless all my memories of him grew dimmed and dull in this new light of cousinhood; clouded, too, as it was, by the horrible thought of Paul.

I remembered that he had never named his father to me, and I no longer wondered at his silence. I shuddered as my imagination, piercing the depths of his heart, painted to my mind all the anguish he must feel in such a parent—all the shame and horror he hid so gayly. Hence a sense of pain grew to me round Hubert's image, heightened by a half-unconscious feeling of disappointment that the love, the care I had deemed so freely given were in reality paid as a duty—a cousinly, brotherly duty which he felt he owed me, though shame for him through whom we were akin made him hide our relationship in his heart. Even his mother did not know it, I was sure; perhaps Paul had married her in a false name, and she was ignorant of all things relating to him. If so, her son was too merciful and kind ever to tell her. In all my thoughts at this period of my life I always did Hubert justice; but, believing him to be Paul's son, I felt with pain that the very touch of his hand would be different to me now, and I turned from the dimmed picture of his once sunny face to the radiant image of my laughing, happy, honored kinsman, Sir Stephen Tremaine.

In a day or two I bade adieu to Miss Priscilla, and stepped into the carriage that was to bear me and Jenifer to Treval. As we journeyed on through the soft days over the hills and dales of Devonshire, I leaned back silent on the cushions, my brain teeming with visions, my heart beating with the expectancy and hope of youth, and my mind still bent on the long-cherished purpose that had haunted me from childhood. When we had passed the Torpoint Ferry, and the wheels rolled over Cornish ground, I roused myself at times to look from the window, and my veins beat with a warmer glow as in our ancient crosses, our old Celtic towns and villages, I recognized the vestiges of a civilization and Christianity swept away from all other parts of Britain by that great wave of heathenism which rushed in with

the Saxons. In leaving the legendary, time-worn soil of Cornwall I had been struck with the *newness* of all things in other parts of England. The places and people had for me such queer, fresh, odd names. To see the shops garnished with such patronymics as Smith, Brown, Robinson, where my childish eyes had been accustomed to read Eva, Rhodda, Tregarthen, or Peneluna, made me think myself in some new land only just finished. Now, in returning to Cornwall, the antiquity of things struck me, and I felt as much out of England as though I were travelling in the East.

"Here's the sea, miss!" cried Jenifer joyfully, as the mighty roll of the Atlantic swept in gloriously upon the ear.

With a flush of delight I fixed my eyes upon the deep blue Cornish sea, nor turned my head away till we neared Treval; then, just as the last flash of the setting sun lit up the whole Western front with a dying flame, touching with a pale fire mullion and shield, carved imp and cherub, I bent eagerly from the window, and with hasty, impatient glance scanned the lawn. The cedar-tree was cut down.

I missed it with a horrible sinking of the heart, and my pale lips recorded instantly a verdict of guilty against Miss Mildred.

#### CHAPTER XLV.

To my surprise we drove up to the north porch, and the great stately doors opened wide on their unaccustomed hinges to receive us. I felt this honor was done to me as the heiress of Treganowen and Treval, but a faint chill ran through my superstitious veins as I stepped over the spot where the body of Alicia Tremaine had rested.

Miss Admonitia, stately in black velvet, stood in the hall to receive me, and, taking me by the hand, led me into the south drawing-room, where my eyes rested on the fragile figure of Miss Mildred. She was dressed in ruby velvet, with stomacher of opal and diamond; a veil of point lace, fastened on the brow by opal ornaments, covered her black hair. She sat near the fire, whose glow fell over her thin hands, and played quivering on her death-white face. A flush grew into her cheeks as I came forward; but whether this arose at sight of me, or whether it was only the shadow of the crimson logs, I could scarcely tell. She trembled as she rose to greet me, scanning my figure from head to foot. As she did so our eyes met, and mine fell before the look of pleading pain with which hers were filled.

Like the Israelitish prince in his chariot who turned and fled, crying, "Treason, O king!" so did I flee before my own purpose, which here, in sight of this worn face

crowned with the pale flame of the gleaming opal, took a shape of deep treachery at which I bowed in shame.

As I stooped and kissed that white cheek—the shadow of the fire on it—I as plainly said, “I will not hurt you, Miss Mildred,” as though my lips had spoken the words.

Surely she understood me, for she sat down with a smile breaking over her pallor, and holding me still by the hand, she said softly—

“You are very beautiful, Esther.”

“I always thought she would be,” remarked Admonitia, proudly. “Mildred, she reminds me of Alicia.”

As she said this, Mildred's hand clasped mine tightly, her lips quivered, her eyes filled with tears.

“Oh, Admonitia!” she said, painfully. “Think of what you are saying. Esther is so young and lovely.”

“She reminds me of Alicia Tremaine,” interrupted Admonitia, with a marked accent, as though she spoke in disdain or bitterness.

Mildred rose hurriedly. “I must go and see Martha,” she said, a little wildly. “Admonitia, take care of Esther the while. You are right—she has a manner, an accent, a something that reminds me of what Alicia was at her age. It is because you have a sympathetic face, Esther.”

She left the room as she spoke, while her sister gazed after her like one who reproached herself for an unkindness. She sighed deeply as she turned to me.

“Do you find Mildred changed, Esther?” she said.

“She is wondrously lovely,” I answered, “as she ever was. Hers is not a beauty years can touch.”

And this was true. The marble face seemed—like marble—imperishable; the dark brows and lashes, the soft lustrous eyes, the exquisite fairness of the polished skin, time had passed over these, and stolen not a grace from their beauty.

“Then do you not think Mildred looks ill?” asked Admonitia, anxiously.

“Ill!” I exclaimed. “No; she was always pale; or if any color came to her cheek it was like the glow in an alabaster lamp when the fire is within, or like the rose shadow of a crimson curtain on a marble statue.”

“You are right,” said Admonitia, in a relieved tone. “Your presence will do Mildred good. We have been too sad and quiet here, Esther, of late, and she has talked gloomily—of death, of I know not what. Are you tired, child?” she added abruptly.

“Not at all,” I answered. “You know, by your wish, I slept last night at Truro, and have only travelled ten miles to-day.”

“That is well; so when we have had tea you must go and dress.

“Dress!” I cried, as at the same time I scanned Miss Admonitia's robe of velvet, her lace and diamonds, at all of which I had slightly wondered, as also at Miss Mildred's rich attire.

“Yes, Esther; we give a ball to-night, and Mildred and I dressed an hour ago, that we might be ready to help you. Your dress is in your room; it came from a court dress-maker.”

Amazement kept me silent, and in truth, on going to my room, I found Jenifer bending in wonder over a robe of pearly satin and lace.

“Make yourself beautiful, for Mildred wants you to please many people to-night,” said Miss Admonitia.

On entering the ball-room, Miss Mildred took me by the hand and introduced me to all the company as her adopted daughter, and I heard, murmurs of admiration and whispers all around. There was a group of gentlemen standing near, and all these, on hearing my name, bent forward eagerly, save one, who, with a look of disdain and annoyance on his face, continued to talk carelessly to his neighbor. That one was Sir Stephen Tremaine.

Flushed with the pride of beauty, glowing with emotion and the hope of victory, my face bore at that hour almost a supernatural loveliness; but I thought not of it then. As Miss Mildred went forward and laid her silken hand on Sir Stephen's arm, I sank back abashed and agitated. He turned instantly, and I saw the change that flashed into his eyes as he caught sight of me and darted forward.

“My fair incognita of the wood!” he cried.

“Miss Esther Treganowen,” said Miss Mildred, softly, “my ward and heiress, Sir Stephen. As this ball is given to do honor to you and Esther, I think you had better dance the first cotillon together.”

Before I had time to speak, Sir Stephen had taken my hand, and placed it on his arm. He seemed like one amazed, and was scarcely less agitated than myself. Doubtless our romantic rencontre in the wood had laid hold of his imagination, and our meeting now, and my identity with the Esther he hated and dreaded, bewildered him. But, whatever his past feelings were, he wanted me to forget them.

“How mistaken I have been throughout!” he whispered eagerly. “Ah! why did you not tell me at Exeter who you were?”

“Because I knew you hated me, Sir Stephen.”

“Do not speak of hatreds,” he continued; “what shall I do to make you forget all my folly?”

I answered him I knew not what, but I thought of Alice Weston's picture, and exerted myself to please.

He was staying in the house, I found—

how clever Miss Mildred was!—and before a fortnight was over I had forgotten that I had promised myself the pleasure of *refusing* Sir Stephen Tremaine—I was thinking only of accepting him. The loneliness of a country house had thrown us so much together, that we seemed to have known each other for years, and many and many a laugh had rung out beneath the old trees, as we talked of his ancient contempt for the weird Esther, at whom he had scoffed in the wintry avenue at Treganowen.

And so a month went by, and he had never once touched upon that compact between my father and Miss Mildred, on which both our minds dwelt so often. At length, one day, as I sat alone in the narrow drawing-room, looking out upon the bees' nest, a step came softly behind me, and, turning, I saw Sir Stephen, with flushed face and sparkling eyes.

"Esther," he said hurriedly, "I have been talking to Miss Mildred—oh, Esther, give me your hand!—say that all she hopes for our happiness is your hope also. Esther!"—and in his agitation he threw his arm around me, and pressed me closely to him—"I have loved you from the moment I saw you in the cathedral. Speak! tell me it is not I only who love."

For one instant my head sank on his shoulder, then I roused myself from my weakness, and said sadly—

"Stephen, you are mistaken—you do not love me. Miss Mildred unworthily forces you to this course. If Alice Weston and I were *both* penniless, or both rich, you would choose her."

Sir Stephen drew back proudly.

"Esther," he said, "as Heaven is my witness, no thought of that odious fortune, which has cost me so much pain, came near my mind as I spoke to you. Since I have known you, I have forgotten it. And what is this about Miss Weston? I knew her only as a pretty child, and talked to her as a man would to a pretty child—that is all."

"You have her picture," I faltered. "Give it to me if what you say be true."

"Let me have your hand, then," said Stephen, "else the exchange is not fair."

Blushing crimson, I held out my hand, which he clasped in his, and then drew me gently to his side.

"And the picture?" I said, as with burning cheeks I received his first kiss.

"Foolish Esther," he answered, "do you think I carry a baby's picture with me everywhere?"

"You did once," said I, smiling.

"That was before I had seen you. I don't know where it is. I will look for it, and give it to you to-morrow. Come, have you no word of thanks for me, my fairy queen?"

\* \* \*

"Jenifer," said I, that night when we met

in my room, "I am engaged to Sir Stephen Tremaine."

Jenifer looked at me wistfully, and burst into tears.

"I've seed it coming this long while," she said; "but it looks all the ooglier now it's here."

Some strange feeling stopped me when I would have asked her why she cried, and I scarcely think I was surprised when Martha brought me a note the next morning, in which Jenifer bade me a sorrowful adieu. She was unhappy at Treval, she said, and she would go to her own village. She hoped the doctor was not dead or dying in that foreign prison; but her heart misgave her, now she saw all his friends desert him.

I cried bitterly over this letter, and Jenifer's departure, for I loved her, and I loved Hubert too, and somehow, now I had triumphed and won Sir Stephen, it did not seem so great a victory, so great a happiness. It had grown out of hate and jealousy, and when I took Alice's picture that day, and would have flung it out into the sea, some feeling of compunction held back my hand, and, carrying it home with me from my solitary walk, I put it with Miss Mildred's agate box.

Then I wrote to Mrs. Spencer and Mr. Winterdale, and asked if they had received any news of Hubert.

Uneasy, restless, and unhappy, I wandered from room to room, till at last, looking down from the window, out of which I had gazed as a child on the cedar-tree, I saw Sir Stephen standing on the lawn. The wind played with his brown curls, and his eyes, filled with the light of love, looked up to mine.

"How handsome he is!" I thought.

"Esther," he whispered, "come down to me, my love, my darling. I am sad as night without you."

He opened his arms with a gay smile, and beckoned to me again and again, but I turned away, and fled to Miss Mildred's sitting-room, and sat down at her knee on a low stool.

"Esther," she said, laying her hand on my head caressingly, "write to your father and mother to-night, and ask them to Treval to your wedding."

I caught her hand, and leaning my cheek against its smooth satin, I answered in a low whisper—

"I will do your bidding, Miss Mildred."

Then I bent my head down lower till I touched her robe, and there resting it, I sobbed and wept.

For her, for Sir Stephen, for hate against Alice. I was giving up all I cared for. Where was honest Jenifer? Where was Hubert? And where was the fierce purpose over which I had brooded so long?

"Miss Mildred," said I, through my tears, "I have had a dream. Nearly every night,

since I came to Treval I have seen old Thomas Flavel, the ghost-layer. He comes to my bedside, he beckons me to rise and follow him to a remote chamber. 'Write,' he says, and I obey. And standing over me, he dictates all the history of that blank time in my life—lost here, Miss Mildred—lost at Treval. And while I write I remember it perfectly, but when I have finished three sheets—every night the same number—he takes them from me and hides them. Vainly I strive to see where he places them; he keeps his secret too well. I return to my room exceeding sorrowful; but, Miss Mildred—here I sank my voice to a whisper—"I find my fingers *stained with ink* when I awake, and I am tired, tired. And day by day, so vivid is my dream, I search through all the rooms for the hidden manuscript, but I never find it. Thomas Flavel is too cunning—he hides it well. But, Miss Mildred, searching thus, I have found this—look, it is a little drawing—a sketch—wondrous like, too, are these touches to my own pencil, yet I swear to you I never drew this, unless I did it in madness, or in sleep—and I showed this likeness—it is a likeness—to Martha, and she cried out, 'Sarah Tregallus! Poor old Sarah! and exactly like her, too!' And oh, Miss Mildred!"—here I clung to her convulsively—"this face is not the face I saw on the roof—oh! don't let me hurt you, Miss Mildred! Send me away ere it be too late, ere I find out something I must tell to the world. Yes, I will write, and bid them come to the wedding, and let it be at once. My father said he would be in London on Monday; he can be here by Thursday—let it be that day. Speak to Stephen for me—do not let him think me bold and forward. It is for you I do this, Miss Mildred—for you I quit Treval."

I never looked up once when I was speaking, but I felt her frame tremble from head to foot.

"My poor Esther," she said, "it was but a dream—no dream of yours can ever hurt me. Give me this sketch of some ancient female which your excited imagination deems so wondrous. I see no likeness in it to Sarah. Yes, the wedding shall be on Thursday; I will manage all things with Sir Stephen."

"But, Miss Mildred"—and still I did not look at her—"Thomas Flavel tells me the secret of the red room."

There was a moment's silence, and the beating of her heart and of mine sounded together.

"And you remember this secret, Esther?"

The hollow sound of her voice startled me. Oh, the desolate ring of patience in it, and the untold pain!

"No, I write it down, and he hides it like the rest. He, a ghost-layer, should he be a ghost himself, Miss Mildred?"

"Esther, do you know that *my room* is the red room? It was I that turned it to simple green and white. It was a blood-red once, and was kept that color in honor of the legend, which says two brothers fought in hatred there in Cromwell's time, and one killed the other."

"Perhaps that's the story I dream," said I, ponderingly. "Are you not afraid to sleep in such a ghostly room?"

"No," said Mildred. "I am not a dreamer like you, Esther."

## CHAPTER XLVI.

It was the Tuesday night before my wedding-day. I was at Treganowen. I had persuaded Miss Mildred to let me spend a few days here with Prudence White; the quiet of the place relieved the excitement of my overwrought mind, and the persistent dream of the old ghost-layer ceased to haunt me. Moreover, this tranquil spot, like the shadow of a cloister sheltered me from Sir Stephen's passionate admiration, which pursued me at Treval with an expression too open and assiduous to please wholly a shy, reserved nature like mine. The shower of tender epithets that fell from his full lips often made me tremble, not with love, but with fear—fear lest the stream which made so great a sound should be shallow—and I shrank like a sensitive plant when the sudden grasp of his warm hand came upon me in the stilly rooms of haunted Treval. At Treganowen I refused to admit him, as I was here alone, and in his absence the fever of my heart, with its strange alternations of love, of terror, of repugnance, abated. Peace drew near again, and laid her cool, fresh hand upon my brow, and thus tranquil, though quivering with all the hope of life and love, my sleep was dreamless and happy.

Suddenly, a confusion and noise in the house awoke me, then my door was flung open, and Prudence White, with lights, came hurrying in, followed by—my mother!

In intense amazement I started up and gazed at her disordered hair, and pale face, and weary looks, all of which spoke of hurried travel. Impatiently she waived Prudence from the room, and then flung herself passionately down by my bedside.

"Esther!" she cried, "is this true? Do you marry Stephen Tremaine on Thursday?"

"It is true," I answered, as, trembling with affright, I gazed at her anxiously.

"And what do those witches at Treval give him?"

"There is no fear of our being poor," said I. "He will inherit Treval at the sisters' death, and meanwhile they settle on him three thousand a year. All this is already arranged."



"A heavy bribe," sneered my mother. "They pay him a good price to forsake Alice whom he loves, and marry you whom he does not love."

"You are mistaken," I replied, coldly. "Stephen loves me; it is Alice whom he does not love."

I drew from beneath my pillow his last passionate letter, filled to overflowing with tenderness; like a full shower of summer rain descending on the thirsty flowers, so poured the free torrent of his words beneath his easy and fiery pen. Then, pointing to some rare flowers on my table, fetched from Exeter, I put the letter in my mother's hand.

"He sent me those and this to-day; read it."

Hastily she cast her eye over the pages, and then exclaimed, in a changed voice—

"God help me! If Alice saw this she would die."

"I am sorry for Miss Weston," said I, sarcastically. "It is certainly unfortunate for her that she should fall in love with a gentleman who, as she must always have known, was destined to marry another. Tell her my husband and I hope she will forget us both, and console herself by giving her heart to some one who will be glad of the gift."

My mother seemed speechless as she listened to me.

"Really," I continued, "it is scarcely kind to talk in this way of Miss Weston's love for Sir Stephen; she might as well care for a married man. You should keep her secret better, mamma."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed my mother.

"No," I answered; "but I am sleepy. Why wake me to-night with the story of this love-sick Miss Weston?—would not to-morrow have been time enough?"

For answer my mother burst into bitter weeping, and clasped me in her arms.

"Oh, Esther, do not retaliate on me so cruelly! Have mercy on Alice! Give up Stephen Tremaine!"

"Give up Stephen?—and for Alice?—no, never!" I cried, forcing myself from my mother's unwonted clasp. "What is Alice to me that I should renounce for her the man I love—the man whose wife I have promised to be in two days? Is he a bauble to be changed from hand to hand? Do his own heart, his own feelings, count for nothing in this, that without reason I should fling him off for the sake of a stranger?"

"A stranger!" cried my mother, in accents like one beside herself. "Alice is your sister—your twin sister!"

I heard, but I could not understand; I could not care—it was too new, too strange, to enter my heart in a moment. I was still hard as rock.

"Alice my sister?" said I in a tone of cold surprise. "Well, and what then? Can I love an unknown sister all at once? I have

been brought up amid secrets—this the cruellest, and if I have any feeling for Alice, it is hatred. I shall not grieve Stephen for her sake—I love *him*. I cannot help your sorrow; you must gather in the bitter fruit of all the secrecy sown around my childhood."

"It was not of my sowing," said my mother, clenching her hands. "It is Mildred's doing; for long years she has brooded on revenge; her scheme was to return into your father's family the misery he brought upon hers. For this you have been reared in ignorance of Alice's existence, for this you were early taught to feel that Stephen was your destiny, for this he was permitted to see Alice continually, and win her whole heart, even from childhood, that his love for her might be calm and tranquil like your father's for Mildred; and—oh, I see her whole plot now!—for this you were kept out of his sight while you were unattractive, that your wondrous beauty and talent might strike the surer blow; and, now an unwitting tool in her hands, you are made to win a fickle man's passionate heart from your sister, that your father, gnashing his teeth in useless anguish, may see the misery or death of one daughter consummated by the happiness of the other. Oh! Mildred has a rare idea of justice!"

My mother had spoken with rapid and fevered utterance; she paused now, exhausted, while I, pondering on her words, felt there was certainly truth in them. Yet I still spoke sarcastically.

"Then, if you knew Mildred loved justice so much, why lend yourself to her plans by permitting Stephen and Alice to meet continually?"

"That was a counterplot of mine," said my mother, slightly abashed. "May not a mother scheme for a child destined to be a beggar? You are the eldest—you take all. I thought those marble women, even if offended, would surely give their cousin Treval."

"You reckoned without Stephen's fickleness," said I, bitterly. "You see Miss Mildred knew him best."

"Listen!" cried my mother with renewed energy. "I knew, because your father loved you, Mildred once meant that *you* should be the forsaken one, and Alice was to have played your part—this would wring your father's soul, she knew."

"And you did not object to this—to his misery and mine—it is only for Alice you feel!" I interrupted, passionately.

"But she relented," continued my mother; "your illness gained you that mercy—and then Alice was made the victim. Well, Mildred has won her revenge. This hatred, this strife between his daughters, to whose loving companionship he has looked forward so long, will kill your father. She is avenged indeed!"

My mother sank down and hid her face on the bed.

"Leave me, and take some rest," said I, firmly. "I will think over this matter. I have need of thought. I will not ask you why you sold me to Miss Mildred, and consented that I should be reared in ignorance of my sister's existence. I believe I can see all your reasons. Miss Mildred is a woman who has known how to take advantage of every circumstance, every sin and weakness surrounding others. But when I meet my father, I will ask him why he consented to such an iniquity. Go, mother, and do not forget that it is your fault if I hear unmoved that I have a sister. Miss Mildred relented towards us *both*, and would have allowed us to be together at Mrs. Spencer's. Had we been companions for three years, I must have loved her—who can tell? I might have done this thing for her then."

"Oh, Esther! Esther!" sobbed my mother, "you stab me to the heart. I am punished indeed for my hatred to you. I thought then—"

"Never mind," said I. "Where is Alice?"

My voice was faint and low. Something was working at my heart—I knew not what—something that tightened and bound it, something new and strange for which I had no name.

"She is here—she is with me. She knows nothing yet—she fancies Stephen true to her as ever. Oh, Esther! he has loved her—they have corresponded for four years! Since his return to England she has expected him daily, and she has not had even a line. Ah, you cannot tell how these two months of anxiety have changed her!"

As these words poured over me, my heart gave a heavy bound, a sickening hot throb, and then I fainted.

All was quiet by my bedside when I recovered, and Prudence White alone sat by me. Feigning fatigue, I at length persuaded her to leave me, then I sat up and began to think. Gradually, slowly, there crept about me a strange new feeling, half joy, half pain. I had a sister—a twin sister—this was the secret on which my life was built, my destiny shaped. Cruelly Miss Mildred had separated me as an infant from this dear tie, that she might work out a slow revenge for her wasted life, her despised love, and her murdered sister. Any way, I and Alice must both suffer, whether she or I took this fickle Sir Stephen for husband. And how much of his love was owing to my wealth? Perhaps all, and if I were poor he would soon go back to Alice—this Alice whom I had hated for so long. And if he remained true to me, what sort of a prize was he to win? What was his or my love worth? In how long or how short a time should I despise him, and feel I had destroyed a sister for a broken toy, or for a remorse hissing like a snake in my conscience?

Fevered by my misery, I rose and dressed, and sat at my window waiting for the dawn. When it came in gray, cold mist, I crept softly down the staircase, but on my way I passed a door half closed; it was next my mother's, and I paused a moment, trembling; the next I had passed within, and with noiseless step approached the bed, and gazed upon the sleeper. A fair young face, that pressed the pillow with gentle touch and quiet breathings—yet not so fair a skin as mine, I thought, and the ebon hair had not the wondrous golden wave that mine held within its blackness. The long dark lashes rested on cheeks still flushed with recent tears, and the lips, half parted, wore a fevered red.

A strange new pity came into my heart as I noted these signs of sorrow and marked the likeness, and yet unlikeness, to myself shining through sleep and sadness on the youthful, rounded face. What a wonder she grew to me as I stood thus steadfastly looking upon her! and what a sudden thrill rushed through my veins as I realized the fact that I was looking upon my other self—the twin life that had haunted me so long! Then for the first time my heart beat with a wonderful tenderness, new-born, unknown, and the word "sister" rose faintly on my lips. Affrighted at the sound, I drew back and held my breath, yet at the same instant I remembered her action—so dreamily seen by me—on the road to Olifton, when she had striven to touch me sleeping, and I put forth my hand and let my finger rest a single moment on her warm, soft cheek, then I fled swiftly away, tears filling my eyes, and sudden, passionate sobs rising in my throat.

Oh, the magic of an electric touch!

It had seemed nothing to me at first that I had a sister, a twin sister; if the wonder moved me, no love came with it, no warm affection; but now that I had seen her, had leaned over her, had touched her, a flood of changed feeling rushed over me. I remembered the haunting memories of my childhood, the dim consciousness of a loneliness not originally mine, the strange fancy of duality, and the suffering of separation. Then I recalled the time when Alice fell into the sea from the ship, bearing me away—I knew now it was Alice—and a curious shudder crept over me at her danger.

"If she had died!" I said hurriedly, and thus thinking, I wept, and ran on through Treganowen woods till I reached the sea. The sky was lowering, the clouds hung low, shutting out the early sun, the grass was tangled with rain, the November leaves dripped moisture on me, and the birds flew away supinely as I passed. But like a shadow I went on, across the slippery rocks, down upon the rough shingle, and then over a low flat waste of sand heavy to

the feet, and thus to the brink of a pool black with the shadows of the granite cliff—a low, desolate pool of fresh water, having no outlet to the sea, barred within itself by the strong sand, a prisoner forever—so near the boundless ocean, and never reaching it—ever hearing the dash of the joyous waves, and never touching them, never joining in the music and the flow—always in these bonds, shut in forever—always and forever bearing in its bosom the black shadow of its prison-wall, and the loneliness and stillness of its own cold waters. Yet the full tide is so near! See, to its very brink comes the lap, lap, of the clear, warm waves; but they never touch it, never pass the barrier, never bring freedom and the salt of glad life to the desolate prisoner.

Oh, pool! barred in forever, so near all freedom and joy, and never reaching it, I am come to thee! Perhaps Alice will die of grief, so I am come. In the still night, while waiting for the dawn, I thought of thy cold waters. I longed to come hither, and throw myself down by these sandy bars, and drop heavy tears down, down forever, and die, if I could.

O God! must I give up all hope? Must I do this thing, and never tell Alice that I have done it? I was so close, close to the sea; another day, another night, and I should have stood by my husband's side, and a boundless life of love would have flowed around me.

Thus sobbed one voice within me, but the other, cold, clear, sensible, whispered sharply—

Esther, you make no sacrifice. If you left him, he would go back with a careless laugh to Alice to-morrow. Do you see those little shining pebbles at your feet? Well, he is not worth one of them. He loves ease, luxury, wealth; to keep these he feared he would have to wed with a weird ugliness that he hated, but he found beauty and a rare, strange fascination. He was delighted that it was not so hard as he deemed to keep his wealth, with all the refinement it brings, and he mistakes his delight for love. If you took him, and Alice grieved, and he grew weary, it would be better to be even this dull pool than such a wife as you would make. In your hands such a heart as his would grow wicked; in hers he might be careless, but he would never be hard. She is simple, gleeful, childish; she is no diver into motives, like you; she cares not to search any one's soul. Now think, if you and she were poor to-morrow, or dowered alike, whom would he choose?

"Oh, Alice, Alice! He would take Alice!" I cried bitterly.

And the vexed spirit had its turn now, and tormented me sorely.

I did not blame Sir Stephen. I had striven hard to win him, and it was no marvel I had

succeeded. I did not blame him that he was glad in my beauty, and thought his gladness was love—it was a love that gave him so much. I did not blame him that he would fain keep his position, and all it brought him. It is so hard to struggle with sordid cares, with pinching want and meanness. No wonder he dreaded going back to these, and accepted so willingly the easy fate Miss Mildred offered. No, it was myself I blamed—it was for me to act, not him. But when I thought on what this act should be, I wept again, and cried out against Mildred.

"Cruel, revengeful woman!" I said between my set teeth, "you have avenged yourself, not upon my father, but upon me! Take care! I may yet turn—yes, I may yet turn—and sting you. I will return to Treval, and if that dream of Thomas Flavel haunts me again, I will yet force the old ghost-layer to tell me the secret of the red room."

Slowly the sun struggled with the rolling mists, heavily the sluggish tide came in with a moaning from the east, which like a shudder passed cold over the shivering pool; the creeping waves touched my feet, reached the brink of the barred waters, then drew back, leaving salt tears behind, and the gray light came down upon me like a prison wall, hedging me around with a cruel damp touch that pierced my flesh, while the battle raged in my veins, and my soul found no peace.

But I conquered—oh, thank God! I conquered at last. And with double thanks let me record here my full praises to Him who helps the stricken, that I conquered before the shadow of Paul Polwhele crossed the dull water, and long before I read the scroll which he placed silently in my hand.

"Your face is gray with sorrow, Esther," he said. "Go home, child; the day is damp, the sand is wet; why are you lying here? Read my story when you are happier; it will not make you merry."

"Paul," said I, gently, "if, when I have read this, you feel *sure* I shall pity you, kiss me now, and say farewell. I do not think we shall meet again. I shall go to India with my father."

Paul stood a moment pondering at my words.

"Ah," he said, "I see what you mean to do, and you are right, Esther. I have had a talk with Lucy. You know now that Alice is your sister; and you must be sisters in spite of all. A ruffian like me has no chance to give a blessing—it would turn to a curse, perhaps. Esther, I can't kiss you—I have been a bad man all my life long. The money you have given me is the only sum I have ever touched that has done me good. It has paid my passage to a far country."

He turned to leave me, but I sprang up and stood before him. Then, stooping, he took my hand, and, murmuring something

about its being a little hand—a little, soft hand, not made for a rough touch like his—he strode away rapidly. I looked after him a moment, and then went slowly, slowly back to Treganowen.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

"AND did you take care of my plants?" said Alice, holding me tightly by the hand. "Oh! I am sure you did, for I left them all for you; I loved them so much, and I loved you so much, I thought they would speak to you of me. I stooped and kissed them before I went away, and said, 'To-morrow, my sister, my twin sister, will water you with her own hands, little flowers; how happy you will be!' I can fancy how you tended them, Esther, and wondered why the unknown Alice had left them for you. And the *Faerie Queene*, too! Did you get it? I made Stephen buy it because he said it was your favorite book, and then I put it on my table for you. Wasn't that clever of me, Esther? And did you care for the little bird I sent you? the pretty piping bullfinch, that sang 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Sweet Home?' I bought the prettiest cage for him that I could find in Bath, and I had my initials S. T.—I knew my second name, Salome, would not betray me—worked over the door. Oh! how I enjoyed sending all those little presents, and wondering to myself what you would think of them. I sent you a hundred kisses by the little bird, and I told him, when he sang, to twitter of all the love I felt, and tell you with his music that I prayed for you always, and thought of you every hour till my heart was full—full as a stream that runs over its banks. You see I always knew I had a sister, and I used to long to be with you, and sometimes I dreamed we were together, and I would put out my arms in the night to touch you, and cry when I awoke. When you were sick, Esther, I nursed you, and you would take your medicine from no hand but mine. How proud I was of that! I never forget the hours. And ah! how I used to rain down tears upon your poor little white face, and tremble lest you should die! At last the fever and delirium were over, and you got better, and then seemingly you forgot all your past life, and I was glad of it, for that life at dreary Treval had lost me my pretty little rosy Esther whom I remembered in India. But you were come back to me now, and we talked, we laughed, we sang together, and were happy all the day long. You were so clever, Esther, you beat me in every thing, and I should never have believed you were still ill, as the doctor said, except for one terrible fancy you had, and to erase this Miss Admonitia came and took you away. Oh, Esther, I was so sorry when you left! And you—were you sorry?"

"I cannot remember it, Alice," said I, softly.

"And so you never recollected me, Esther!—never loved me, never thought of me! Ah! you should have thought of me sometimes, the poor exile from home, shut out of your heart by Miss Mildred's cruel request, and even my very name denied me. Say, Esther, do you love me? You don't hate me, do you? I know you can't love me as dearly as I love you, because you forgot me when you recovered, and you were kept ignorant of my existence, and I heard of you always, and was free to love you. But say, Esther, you don't dislike me, do you?"

"Oh, Alice!" said I, trembling as she clung to me, "why do you ask me such bitter questions?"

"Say you love me then," said Alice, pinching my cheek.

"I love you," I answered, "and I will not take away your books, or your flowers, or any thing that is yours."

Alice clapped her hands gleefully.

"Oh! that is exactly like my little Esther, the tiny, wee, baby sister I remember in India; you always gave me all your picture-books, your playthings, and your flowers."

"Did I?" said I abstractedly.

"Yes. But afterwards, you know, you took every thing from me. I don't mind the fortune, Esther—you are the eldest, and if grandpapa left his grim old towers to the eldest you can't help it—but I *do* mind my name. I hated to be called Weston when I knew I was a Treganowen, but of course I obeyed papa. How lovely you are, Esther! But you look sad, dear. Why, it is I who should look sad! Only think how sorrowful I might have been all my life, if mine were not so happy a heart, that I can't help being glad! You have had all the good fortune, my pretty sister, and I nothing. I declare, now, you have even got all the beauty—hasn't she, mamma?"

Alice laughed at the idea, but never seemed to expect an answer. I pondered on her words, which were both true and untrue. I had the name, the fortune, but she had all the love—yes, even my father's—I saw it now. The thought was too heavy, worn out with sorrow and sleeplessness as I was, and I startled Alice by flinging myself suddenly on my knees, and clasping her tightly; then I rested my head on her lap, and burst into tears.

How lovingly she soothed and caressed me, and how new and strange it was to have that little soft hand resting on my head, and to feel those pure kisses showered upon my hot brow!

"There, now you are smiling again," said Alice, "and as a reward I'll tell you a secret—a great secret."

And then talking as though speech were

some new-found blessing, she opened her heart to me, spread out all her little hopes and fears, told me of Stephen's letters from the wars, and how these had stopped suddenly, and she half thought he was ill, or half feared he was fickle. And under this fear she had grown thin and pale of late; once she had fresh roses in her cheeks, and people had called her pretty, but she was worn and faded now, quite a poor thing to look at, she knew, and she wished she might grow beautiful again, but only for his sake, I could be sure of that.

Thus she prattled on, stabbing me to the heart innocently, while I answered back with cheerful words, untinged by the jealous pain of the wound she gave.

And now the carriage arrived to take me back to Treval and at sight of it my mother, having succeeded in all she wished, grew frightened, and, drawing me aside, she began to debate on the consequences of Miss Mildred's anger.

"Leave it to me, and I will answer for all," I said, sadly. "Only keep Alice from the servants, that no gossip may fall upon her ear of my coming marriage."

"You look ill, Esther," said my mother, with unwonted kindness. "Take Dominica with you. I can spare her, and she has come to me twice this morning to beg that she might go with you."

"As you will," I answered, carelessly. "It does not matter whom I take with me, for Jenifer has forsaken me; nothing matters much in this world, I think."

I kissed Alice and my mother, and departed for Treval. How changed the road seemed since I drove over it three days ago! And yet here is the flowering furze like a golden wall on either side, and there lie the glorious hills of granite, and the surging sweep of the blue sea, all beautiful as ever.

I turned my eyes abruptly from the fair scene, and fixed them on Dominica's face, and as I gazed a sudden recollection grew upon me.

"Dominica," I said, "I sat to-day by the side of that lonely pool on the sands which the peasants call Wisht-man's-weir; and as I lay there thinking, two shadows of people on the cliffs above troubled the water. What has Mr. Winterdale asked you to do, Dominica?"

I fancied she changed countenance, but she answered readily enough—

"He begged me to tell you that Jenifer is gone away, no one knows whither, and he ordered me to give you his nephew's address, miss. Here it is.

With intense joy I snatched the paper from her hand, and forgetting all about Mr. Winterdale, I sank into a reverie, from which I was only aroused by our arrival at Treval.

"Your father will be here to-morrow," said Miss Mildred, clasping my hand with

an unwonted light in her dark eyes. "He could not come to-day, so I fear the wedding cannot be till Saturday, Esther, for Friday, you know, is an unlucky day."

"Then let it be Saturday," I answered.

My soul was bitter within me at this pale, cold woman's slow revenge, so, unable to bear her presence, I turned hastily away, lest some sharp speech should betray the purpose that once more rankled hotly in my heart. She let my hand go lingeringly, and her flushed face paled, and her eyes were shadowed with sorrow, as she watched me leave the room.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

"Am I bound now to show her mercy?" I asked myself. "Surely, for my sister's sake, I ought to pursue this secret. I have no right to fling Stephen into beggary. I must at least gain power to make him and Alice happy. Let me wring that much from this cruel woman, and I will be content."

Then I leaned my head upon my hands, and tried to form some plan of search, through which I might be sure to leave no room or garret unvisited in old Treval. The sketch I had shown to Martha, which she declared to be the likeness of Sarah Tregellas, I had found in one of the forsaken bedrooms of the great corridor, hence I determined to explore this part of the house first. But when I put my hand upon the lock of my door, and would have gone forth, I heard Miss Mildred's voice, and with a beating heart, I started back and sat down again like a coward.

"I will think of some new plan," I muttered. "But first, what is Miss Mildred saying? Let me listen."

"Dominica, take this wine to Miss Esther; she is looking pale. Do not say I sent it, but induce her to drink it, if you can. The poor child is ill, I am certain. No, I cannot go to her, Dominica. I—I think she would not like to be disturbed by me."

Oh! why that old desolate ring of patience in her voice? why that sad certainty in her tone of knowing herself disliked? Because she lost my father's love, has she lost the love of the whole world? How gentle she is! how strangely self-denying, kind, and lovely! I cannot do anything to hurt her. No, no! I cannot. Spare me this task, relentless fate!

"Put the tray down there, Dominica. Yes, yes, I will drink the wine, if it will please Miss Mildred. I heard what she said: go and tell her I am well."

Alone once more; and again my brow rests upon my hand in thought.

This morning she seemed to me a monster—why does she send me wine? I will not

touch it. She is cruel as the grave. This long, slow scheme of vengeance, this concealment of Alice's existence from me all my life—it is dreadful, horrible!

Yes, *I will* find out the secret of that woful face upon the roof, nothing shall hold me back.

Again my fingers turned the lock, and trembling at my purpose, I stood a moment in the long passage outside my room. Then, with slow, unwilling steps, I forced myself to traverse it, and reached the great corridor, crossing the western front, and there again I paused, ere I entered the room where I had found the likeness of Sarah Tregellas.

Upon a small inlaid table near the window, I was startled to see my portfolio, which, before Jenifer left me, I had missed and searched for in vain. "I must have brought it here and forgotten it," I thought.

Then, throwing myself into a chair close by, I turned over the leaves listlessly, still pursuing my old train of thought by one thread, while another wound on thus: "Ah, here is the grotesque caricature of my poor Aunt Priscilla, drawn by a ghost for the benefit of the Miss Colters and the Miss Bolters." I placed it within the book and turned page after page, scarcely giving a look to the weird designs in which my pencil delighted. But suddenly a feeling of tightness seized my heart, my cheeks grew hot, my eyes swam in tears; I held in my hand a portrait of Hubert Spencer, not hastily drawn like the sketch of Sarah, but limned carefully, lovingly, with the features so well defined, with the kindly thought, the wondrous charm and beauty of his sympathetic face, so skilfully portrayed, that he seemed to smile upon me; and I, putting the drawing down, burst into tears.

"Oh! Jenifer!" I cried, sobbing, for I was sure it was she, "why have you hidden this here?"

Then I fell to wondering how she had got it for me. Often I had tried to draw a likeness of Hubert from memory, but I had always failed. And Jenifer, looking over my shoulder, would call my failures by every ugly name in her vocabulary, and ask if such a face as Hubert's could be made out of "inky water, or colored pisons?" Doubtless she had procured this from Mrs. Spencer, but it brought me no joy; Paul's shadow was over it, and I thrust it out of sight with tears, and a painful shudder. As I did this, another drawing displaced, fluttered to the ground. I stooped to pick it up, then as my eye glanced over it, I stood upright in breathless fear and amazement. The picture portrayed the bent, fragile figure of a woman, seated in a long, low room, dimly lighted—a room I had never seen—and her face was that of the phantom on the roof, the patient, weary, woful face I had watched from the cedar-

tree. The drawing was done by a masterly hand, and in the corner in quaint figures was written—

"THOMAS FLAVEL, GHOST-LAYER."

Sick with fear I laid it down, and sought painfully in my brain for the meaning of this mystery: I could find none, but I resolved to show the picture to no one, and fearing Martha or Miss Mildred might see it, I carried the portfolio to my room, and locked it away.

Then I searched resolutely through the house, from chamber to chamber, though my footsteps sounded to my ears like a traitor's, and a whispering voice continually reminded me of all Miss Mildred's kindness.

"And remember," it said, "she relented, she would have permitted you and Alice to be dear companions."

"That was Hubert's doing," I answered. "Oh, why was he always so watchful, so tender?"

"It was not Mildred's fault," continued the voice, "that Alice wept in bitter disappointment, grieving for you, as she rode from Clifton, neither was it her doing that you hated your sister, and plotted in your heart to take away her lover."

I ceased my search abruptly. I could discover nothing that day, nor on the next, when from the lawn I counted all the windows, allotting to each its chamber, from the great library, with its gothic arch, to the topmost garret, with its little casement, out of which I had leaned, on that memorable day upon the roof.

But I will say no more of my feverish search, pursued sometimes in remorse, sometimes in anger. Let it suffice that two or three days thus passed by, and meanwhile my father did not arrive. This delay was to me like a reprieve to the condemned. Still on every pretence possible I avoided Stephen Tremaine, and escaped from his assiduities by a thousand excuses. An unnatural bustle pervaded Treval, and yet in the turmoil a stillness, like the silence of a coming tempest. Worn out by emotion I wandered feverishly from room to room, sometimes on staircase or in corridor overtaken or met by my betrothed, who seized me with a warm, loving hand, and poured forth questions on my strange mood, intermingled with caresses, which I bore passively, ere escaping from his grasp, I wandered away again, like one demented by sorrow. At length my father came, and repressing the yearning which burnt within me to fling myself into his arms and weep away my grief, I only greeted him with a calm affection, and then sought a quiet place wherein to weep, and shutting myself in my chamber I wept there.

Ah! I was very young, witch and wise

woman though they called me, and soon the tears and sobs subsided into slumber sweet and simple as a vexed child's. A tap at my door aroused me. It was Dominica with one of those tiny cups of tea then fashionable. This woman's attention to me had been so great that my suspicion and dislike of her had half faded away.

"Drink this, and let me dress you, Miss Esther," she said. "In another hour every one will be assembled in the great drawing-room, and your father and Miss Mildred will meet for the first time these many, many years."

I started up from the bed where I had flung myself, and gazed at her with eyes scarce unlocked from sleep. It seemed to me that she had brought the old ghost-layer with her, and I was to rise and follow whithersoever they led. Every night since my return to Treval he had haunted me as before, and filled as my thoughts were awaking, it was still he who held them in sleep. And still he dictated the history of that blank time, and hid it with relentless mystery.

"Dominica," said I dreaming, "there is a secret close at my right hand, yet I cannot touch it—a secret that would give me power and revenge over a cruel woman, yet I cannot lay a finger on it, for it comes to me and goes like a shadow."

Then waking up I thrust these words aside, and prayed her hurriedly to fetch Sir Stephen.

"Bid him meet me in the west drawing-room, that looks out upon the bees'-nest," I said.

In five minutes I was standing in the bay window where I had first heard words of love from Stephen's lips. I had held the place dear for his sake, but now I shuddered as I thought of the bitter recollections that would henceforth be planted here.

There was a hurried step, a firm hand upon the look, and then without daring to look up, I welcomed my lover by my crimsoned cheeks.

"Esther," he said, standing by my side for the first time timidly, and without the eager clasp with which he too often emphasized his words—"Esther, what is this? You are changed—these three days past no kind word or look has greeted me. Is this as it should be, Esther, standing as we two are on the verge of that solemn day which shall bind us both together till death?"

It seemed as though, when I was about to quit him forever, he should make me love him more by gentler, wiser words than of old.

I could not look up, for my eyes were full of love—a love that I did not altogether despise and hate, as I mostly hated my love for this glittering idol of my imagination.

"Stephen," I faltered, "you are right; things are not as they should be between us two."

My trembling voice broke here, for I could feel his pain, his suspense, stabbing me; but a moment more and a burning flush covered my face, as the fierce determination again arose that Mildred's revenge should fail, and the cruel dart glance harmless aside from my father's peace and Alice's breaking heart.

"No, things are not as they should be," I continued firmly, "for you have deceived me, and I have deceived you. I have acted in coquetry and vanity; you half in vanity and half from the necessity of your position. Esther Treganowen or poverty—these were the alternatives, and you were pleased when you found Esther was not a witch."

"Esther, are you mad?" cried Stephen, seizing my hand. "Of what are you accusing me?—of what are you accusing yourself?"

"Of the bitter truth," I said, as I gently drew away my hand. "You do not really love me, nor I you; pardon me, and let us part."

Stephen gazed at me in amazement and anger. "This is some childish whim," he cried—"this is because you will keep faith with your silly word, when you swore in childish anger you would refuse me."

I looked up and met his angry eyes. Heaven help me!—there was no refusal, no scorn in mine, nothing but anguish. I confess it, though I laugh now at the short, foolish passion that beguiled me. That look routed me. Stephen had me in his arms in a moment.

"You do not love me!" he cried, as he kissed cheek and brow. "By this and that, you love me too well to play the baby with me thus. Who shall part us now, Esther?"

The straining clasp in which he held me was like a chain. I had no happiness in it, only a sense of pain, and a longing to be free from his thrall, a loathing, too, of his power which drooped my head upon his shoulder, and fastened my hand in his. Then he raised his face triumphant laughter and love falling in a shower from his eyes to mine.

"Who talks of parting?" he said. "What silly little captive is this, who with words of farewell on her lips comes creeping to my arms for a loving word and a kiss? Why, Esther, a silken string would hold you; with my shadow I could bind you a prisoner to my side; but to-morrow"—and his eyes gleamed—"I shall put a heavy fetter on this little hand in the shape of a golden ring, and then my tamed eagle will be my fluttering dove—my—"

"Not your slave, Sir Stephen!" I cried hastily, while every throb of life within me rebelled against his words. Now, indeed, as I stood flushed and indignant before him, I felt I could never take him as a husband—a master; now, indeed, I knew I did not love him.

"Who talks of slaves?" he said.

"I do," I answered, mournfully. "When I marry I will be a slave from head to foot, from crown to heel, body, soul, and spirit a slave, and I can never be that to you, Sir Stephen. I repeat, I do not love. I am two Esthers, not one. One loves you, one yields to your kiss, and bears humbly your pride and triumph; the other hates you, and loathes herself because hand and lip have touched yours. Now marry me if you dare!"

With flashing eyes and burning cheeks I stood before him, and awaited his answer; and then with cold contempt I saw the fear that came over his face, and read the thought within him that I was touched with madness—a dangerous wife for a man to have—a panther, soft, beautiful, gracious, but deadly. He shrank away from me, and leaned against the mantel-piece, shading his brow with his hand.

"Esther, you choose a strange time for your mad speeches. Do you know our marriage settlement will be signed to-night?"

"Yes, and the deeds which give you Treval, and put you in possession of the price paid you for taking a wife you do not love."

"Esther!" exclaimed Stephen, "now you insult me, and I cannot forgive that. If you are in earnest, we had indeed, better part, late as it is to do it."

"My husband," said I, "shall never be suspected of any thing for which I *could* insult him."

"Esther, I will not bear this even from you. How dare you accuse me of such despicable meanness?"

"Thank God," said I to my soul, "there is manhood and truth in him. Alice will be happy. I never should. I should never believe there was good in him. I should always be searching for it, as I am, now; and how dreadful of a wife to say of her husband, 'Thank God, there is good in him!'"

Rapid as lightning was my thought, and then I spoke: "I accuse you because I believe money, not love, has made you my suitor. This belief rankles in my heart, it fills me with suspicion and jealousy. I could not be happy as your wife, so we must part."

Stephen turned his face from me, but he made no reply. The heaven was already working, and the thought creeping about his soul that I was proud, cruel, false—an unloving, ungenerous woman, with whom life would be a tempest.

"And it is true," I continued, sadly, "that I do not love you with my whole entire nature; something within me revolts against your power; the man I marry I must love and worship with *both* my beings, not with only one, as I do you."

"You are blessed," he answered sarcastically; "most people are content with having one soul."

"It is not my fault if you cannot understand me," I responded. "If I had said my heart and my judgment do not agree, you would comprehend, I suppose."

"It would be simpler language, Miss Treganowen," he replied, "and there would be a grain of sense in it, which my stupidity failed to see in your other speech. You make this flattering discovery very late," he added, bitterly.

"Yes, it is late, but not too late. You will forgive me one day, Sir Stephen, but when a wife makes such a discovery, a husband never forgives. If I married you to-morrow I should make you miserable."

He looked at me as if he thought our opinions tallied, but he simply said—

"In this mood, certainly."

Pride bore him a moment longer, then he broke down with a cry like a sob.

"Oh, Esther! I thought you loved me."

"May God forgive us all!—Mildred is a cruel woman," said I to myself, as with shrinking eyes I looked upon his grief.

"Stephen," I said, gently, "try to forgive me. I am very wretched, more wretched than you will ever know. The time will come when you will be glad of this, but perhaps the time will never come when I shall be glad. Things lie in my path that can never block up yours, and if you suffer a little, love, health, wealth, will console you."

He scarcely seemed to hear me: he was trying to understand that he was not my lover—not my husband.

"Wealth!" he exclaimed, as he raised his head. "I am a beggar."

"So am I," said I, proudly. "Stephen, I am no heiress. It is my intention to-night to refuse Miss Mildred's benefits."

"And why?" asked Stephen, coldly.

"Simply because I am her enemy; and I have resolved on bringing her to justice for long years of cruelty to me and mine."

"What has she done to you, Esther, save lavish love and riches on you?"

"She has brought me up amid secrets; she has hidden from me all my life long that I have a sister—a twin sister."

Sir Stephen in amazement looked at me, as though he thought I had lost my reason.

"You know her," I continued. "She is Alice Weston."

"Alice! Alice Weston your sister?"

A deep flush covered his face, and his eyes fell before mine.

"Yes, and she is close by, at Treganowen, with my mother. Go and see her; she will be glad; she tells me she has known you long."

"How refreshing it will be to him to go to her in all her frank, cheerful simplicity of heart and soul after leaving *me*!" I said to myself, bitterly.

Some remorse, some sad thought was working on Stephen's face.

"Poor little Alice," he said, pondering



deeply. "And was she to have come to our wedding to-morrow?"

I shook my head. "She has heard of no weddings. Oblige me in one thing, Stephen. I am proud; do not tell my sister that you and I were once betrothed; never tell her of this project of marriage between us. Promise me. I have already my mother's word."

Was it a sigh of relief or of pain that burst from Stephen's lips, as he said, eagerly—

"I promise you, Esther, on my honor. And do you indeed desert me? Have you resolved to make me and yourself penniless?"

"For myself I am resolved," I answered; "but there is no reason why you should lose any thing. Miss Mildred is not unjust; she will see this is my doing, not yours, and she will act accordingly, and perhaps she will bestow on my sister the wealth I intend to refuse."

Sir Stephen rested silent, as if pondering my words.

"And what am I to do?" He said at length, in a changed tone. "I cannot be present now at this family meeting."

"Miss Mildred never meant you should be," I answered. "After the signing of the settlement she would ask you to quit us."

Sir Stephen sighed deeply. Well, the settlement certainly was magnificent—it was worth a sigh.

"And what am I to do?" he reiterated, wearily.

"Go to Treganowen," I answered, "I will account to her for your absence. Believe, too, that I will care for your interests; none will do it as I shall, Stephen. Now take this monthly rose to Alice for me."

Mechanically Sir Stephen took it from my fingers, and gazed at me wistfully.

"Is there no hope, Esther? Are we parted forever and ever?"

"Forever," I echoed. "And I only ask that you will not tell my sister of our foolish love."

Did I not know, when I said these words, that if he told the whole world he would not tell her? But I was not one to do a thing by halves. If I had shown jealousy, if I had uttered a reproach, if I had let him see that I ever knew of his love for Alice. I could not plant the barb in his self-love which would destroy any pleasant thought of me, and bring him back to her. So I ruthlessly cut and wounded his heart till I felt he hated me, and I uttered not a word which could show him I knew the secret of his fickleness. All the blame of this abrupt change, this hard cruelty, I took on myself. "And on myself alone," I said aloud, "Miss Mildred's anger shall fall."

He looked at me in wonder.

"Who can understand you?" he said. "You have been brought up strangely. Why has your sister's existence been kept secret from you?"

How I could have answered him! But I only said quietly, "I cannot tell you. It is a family history belonging more to my father and Miss Mildred than to me."

"Alice was always interested in you," he remarked, thoughtfully.

"She is a lovely girl," said I, "good and gentle, and her heart is fresh and pure as the first dew. When she loves—" I stopped, but it seemed to Sir Stephen I had said more, for he cried out eagerly—

"Yes, Esther, when she loves it will be with her whole heart, not with half her spirit, as you say you do. I firmly believe you have never loved me."

He did not see my scalding tears, for I turned away from him with my hand upon the door.

"You speak like an oracle, Stephen, I never loved you; it was all vanity, romance, the veriest rubbish of a wild imagination."

"Take care!" he cried fiercely, "do not exasperate me too much. A man cannot always be played with and insulted in this way. Love is a raging fire; men have shot women for less than you have said to me."

His words did not frighten, they softened me. I turned towards him with a more generous sorrow in my heart than I had felt yet.

"Say you forgive me," I said. "We can never meet again like this."

He did not heed me.

"Esther, recollect in rejecting me you beggar me also. Take the sole responsibility of this deed upon yourself. Disappoint your father, anger Miss Mildred, beggar me if you will, but remember I am not the guilty one, though it is I who must bear the consequence of your sudden, selfish, and cruel change. You are safe—the Misses Tremaine love you—you will not suffer. As for me, they only took me from obscurity for your sake. Farewell, Miss Treganowen; you are unworthy of the love I so blindly gave you. I shall not grieve for you. It is better to work for one's bread than to have such a wife as you. I fling you *all* off, and would to God I had been brave enough to be independent before!"

Without a touch of the hand, without a look or a sign, he opened the window and sprang out upon the green sward, and dashing aside the seringas strode away with hasty step.

I sank down upon the carpet and burst into an hysterical laugh.

"Such a love as this is not worth weeping for," I said to myself bitterly. "I wonder how much of what we have felt and said is *real*, and how much was like the actor's passion, which only runs through his veins while the scene fires him!"

Ah! since my imagination painted a halo round this idol—since I lent myself a tool to Miss Mildred's schemes of vengeance, in

what a maze I have wandered! I know not now whether I am glad or sorry, whether I love or hate, whether Stephen is good or bad. I only know that towards myself I feel an intense contempt from head to heel. And all the world is false, hollow, a sham, *stagey* like myself! Pough! I am sick!

Oh, Jenifer! my poor Jenifer! I wish you were here. I could talk to you about Hubert; that would do me good.

At this moment I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs on the western road, the road to Treganowen, and I no longer doubted whether I felt glad or sorry. Like one relieved from the heaviness of a great weight, I sprang up stairs to my own room and dressed quickly, wondering the while why a parting I had deemed so difficult and cruel should prove so easy.

Then dismissing Dominica, and counting forty minutes on the clock to the hour when I should be summoned to the great drawing-room, I drew forth Paul's narrative and read it. I had vowed to myself, that till I and my silly love were parted, I would not probe the secret of my cousinship to Hubert Spencer.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

I WILL not speak here of this secret, or show in words a single wave of that sea of emotion which agitated me, as I put the narrative aside, and prepared to descend to the drawing-room.

According to Miss Mildred's wish I was dressed in white, no single touch of color except the small green leaves of the pearly Cornish heath, which trimmed my Dacca muslin, appearing on my dress. The flutter of my slight robe, light and soft as cobweb, made me pause in sudden fear, as I descended the staircase, and I looked back in terror, wondering if the interruption I anticipated to the imposing ceremony Miss Mildred had prepared, were already come, too early for my wish.

But no, all was silent, and never did Treval appear to me so hushed, so ghostly, so haunted, as with soft step, and closed lips, and every nerve trembling with secret expectation, I crept on through hall and corridor, till I reached the door of the great drawing-room, where the murmur of voices told me Miss Admonitia and others were already assembled. Then entering, I walked softly across the carpet, and took my place silently by my father's side.

"Can this be Miss Mildred?" I asked myself, as with the flush of excitement on my cheeks I rose as she entered.

Her dress was of white satin; a long sweeping robe, edged with an arabesque worked in jet and small diamonds. Her hair was dressed in the old style, drawn high

from the forehead, with long undulating waves trailing on her neck, and a few diamonds glanced here and there like gleaming fire amid their rich black tresses. Her face wore an unwonted flush, and her eyes shone brightly. She was certainly beautiful, and no one would have dreamed of giving her the full compliment of years that had passed so painfully over her pale brow. The white dress took somewhat from the fragility of her figure, and in giving roundness added youth, so now for the first time I had a true idea of that loveliness which in girlhood had gained her the title of the white rose.

My father advanced hurriedly to meet her as she entered. He was much agitated, and seemed scarcely conscious of his action, as he took her hand and placed her in a chair.

"Mildred," he said in a low tone, but no further word broke from his quivering lips. To see this pale woman was to see the ghost of his dead youth, and to raise from their shrouds a thousand memories whose reproachful presence stifled speech.

Mildred's lip, too, shook an instant, but then in the softest accents of her silvery voice her tones broke distinctly, gently on the ear.

"I am sorry, Ralph, we could not ask your wife here to-night. Lucy will come to-morrow to Esther's wedding."

In my hot, angry heart I had resolved to let all things go on as she willed till the time arrived for me to speak, so I returned no contradiction to her words.

My father bowed his head in reply, his eyes fixed mournfully on the face he had once loved so well.

Then Mildred turned towards me, laying her thin white hand on the parchment before him.

"Esther, where is Stephen? Why does he delay?"

"He is gone to Treganowen on a message for me," said I in a low voice. "I was sure you would not want him, Miss Mildred."

Mildred smiled kindly, and my cruel heart smote me like a stab.

"Well, your settlement must be signed in the morning," she said. "You have certainly spared me some embarrassment, Esther, for I only wanted Stephen during the reading of this deed of gift, by which Admonitia bestows on him the estate and mansion of Pencarrow, which brings in a rental of three thousand a-year."

"Is there any condition with your gift?" I asked.

"Admonitia and I do not make conditions with our gifts, Esther."

With a sigh of relief I came forward to the table.

"You give it without reference to me—it would be his if I were dead—if I were to die to-morrow."

"Certainly," said Admonitia, gravely. "We owe him this injustice, having brought

him up as our heir; but it is nevertheless true that your marriage—"

"Oh! do not say so!" I cried, eagerly.

But Miss Mildred stayed my further speech by laying her silken hand upon my head.

"What matters it our motive, Esther? Freely we give it, freely Sir Stephen accepts the gift. Mr. Tresidder, let us sign at once."

An old gentleman seated by the window, whom I had long known as the confidential solicitor of the sisters, came forward and pointed to the spot where Miss Admonitia was to place her signature.

"And may I be the witness?" said I, eagerly.

"He cannot say now I have beggared him," I thought with joy, as with rapid pen I wrote my name.

Then the parchment was set aside on a distant table, and Miss Mildred, beckoning with her hand for silence, said softly—

"Mr. Tresidder, will you oblige me by reading Admiral Treganowen's will?"

As the old gentleman untied the tape round a small packet, I glanced on the assembled faces. My father was pale, even to deathliness; Miss Admonitia simply watchful of her sister; Miss Mildred I can only compare to a trembling flame: there was the quivering as of a suppressed fire in her; her very hair seemed rustling, her eyes gleamed, and the firm yet agitated clasp of her hand on a small casket, told of a strength and burning like the bursting forth of a volcano. In the quiet holding in of our breath, in the stillness of our excitement, the rustling of the paper in Mr. Tresidder's hands, was a sharp pain in the ear, and the monotonous tones of his voice were a maddening irritation.

"Miss Treganowen will understand, of course," he said, "that I hold here only the copy of her grandfather's will, and its contents are new to no one here excepting herself."

With this preamble he began thus—

"This is the last will and testament of me, Arthur Crehylls Treganowen, of Treganowen Towers, in the county of Cornwall, Esquire. I give and bequeath all my personal property, of whatever kind or nature, after payment of my just debts, and funeral and testamentary expenses, unto my dear wife, Loveday Alice Treganowen, for her sole and separate use; but in case she shall not be living at the time of my decease, then I give and bequeath the same to my son, Ralph Tregarthen Treganowen. I give and devise all my real estate called Treganowen Towers, situated in the county of Cornwall aforesaid, and all other real estate of which I may die, seized, unto Mildred Salome Tremaine, of Treval, in the said county of Cornwall, unto such uses as she may at any time hereafter, by any deed or deeds, or by her last will in

writing, direct, limit, and appoint. I nominate, constitute, and appoint my said wife sole executrix of this my will. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this fourth day of February, seventeen hundred and eighty.

"ARTHUR CREHYLLS TREGANOWEN.  
(L.S.)

"Signed, sealed, published, and declared by the said testator as and for his last will and testament in the presence of us, who, at his request and in his presence, and in the presence of each other, have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

"SAMUEL TRESIDDER,  
Solicitor, Truro.

"WM. HODGE,

"TOBIAS VINNEY,

Clerks to Mr. Tresidder."

As Mr. Tresidder finished reading this brief testament, he bowed to us, and quitted the room.

Then Miss Mildred rose, and the sad rustle of the satin robe she wore sounded like the flutter of uncertain wings, as though her good spirit fled unwillingly away.

"We meet, Ralph," she said, "not to rake up the dead past, but to build a happy future for you and yours. Surely a wedding is a happy thing. But Esther has been brought up in ignorance of facts connected with her family which it is now necessary to reveal. Have I your permission to speak?"

My father bowed his head, but there was a world of pain in the quiet affirmative.

With her hand upon the casket, Miss Mildred opened it, took from it a faded letter, and unfolded it with firm white fingers.

"Ralph—Esther!" she said—Oh, how silvery clear and calm her voice, how stormy the lurid light of cruel fire in her eyes!—"that will before the world gives me Treganowen, this letter takes it away. Listen."

Then the soft sound of her voice rippled over the ear in sweetest music, such as the moonlight might speak, or the last palest ray of sunset utter in its farewell to the earth, as it dies in a quivering shimmer in the night-shadowed sky.

"To Miss MILDRED SALOME TREMAINE.

"You, Mildred, and you only, have long known of the remorse and sorrow gnawing at my heart. I am a crushed man, but I die repentant, earnestly desiring to do justice. I herein confess my crime that I wickedly conspired against my brother, and by means of my cruel plot I became the cause of his ignominious death. An hour before he mounted the scaffold he sent me a letter by a sure hand. In this, to my amazement, he acknowledged his marriage with a girl of low birth, by whom he had a son and daughter."

ter, and he charged me, on pain of his bitter curse, to find his wife and children, and give them their rights of name, position, and fortune. He spoke incoherently of his children, begging me to take heed that he had but one son, who had been stolen, he said, in childhood, and had fallen into bad hands; he might even, he feared, be now a thief. Yet if he could be found he was his heir, but if my efforts to recover him should fail, then I was to give his daughter £10,000, and to hold his estates in trust until such time as his son, or his son's heirs, could be discovered. Should he, however, have died a dishonorable death, or have married with any other save a lady by birth or name (and this he said, fearing his son's children might be the offspring of some low woman of the jails), or should forty years pass over, and his son or grandsons remain un-found, then I was to yield his estates to that one of his daughter's children whom I should select.

"Thus this letter, partially incoherent, and unsigned, and unwitnessed, and perchance legally worthless, had yet the sacredness of a will, and God has punished me that I have unheeded it. True, I made some faint efforts to find my brother's widow and children, but they failed; yet lately you and I, Mildred, have reason to think these latter live, and I charge you, as you wish for mercy in heaven, to find my brother's heirs, and fulfil his will as written in his last message to me. And I desire that you will hold my estate in trust, and if his son be unworthy, or have died a shameful death, or if he have intermarried with vice, or his children be illegitimate, then I charge you, after forty years from my brother's death have passed, to yield over the estate of Treganowen to that one of my brother's daughter's children whom you may select or appoint. And I hereby give you the power to make this selection, which my brother delegated to me. And I do hereby beseech and implore you not to take counsel of any one, but to hold all this a secret, that my brother's ignominious death, and my share therein, may be forever hidden from the world. And I further beseech you to comfort and help my son Ralph as much as lies in your power. But if he resists your will, in aught that you may request in your endeavors to do justice and fulfil my behests, then I charge you, on the curse of a dying man's soul, to proclaim aloud my crime and my brother's crime of mutiny and murder, through mine, for which he suffered death by hanging, that thus Ralph's disobedience to my wishes, expressed through you, may cause the name of Treganowen to become a curse and an infamy to all ages. May God avert this sin from him, and spare you the pain of doing this! And I further pray that you will induce my son Ralph to inhabit Treganowen Towers, that by this and other

means you may both hide my guilt and sorrow from evil tongues.

"Mildred, I know your courage and your love, and I die believing that if justice can be done you will do it. I desire you, if God should spare you, to wait twenty-eight years after my death before you bestow Treganowen on that child of my brother's daughter whom you may select, provided, of course, that his son, or son's son cannot be found. At the end of that period, if you can discover no descendants of my brother's, then act as if they were dead, let my testament remain in force, and God's will be done.

"Mildred, you have refused to let me thank you for the noble secrecy you kept through that bitter time when the world, with Ralph at its head, accused you of murder. One word from you would have proved your innocence, but that word would have made the name of Treganowen a hissing and a by-word forever. So you were silent, and I, a cowardly old man, looked on and held my peace. I let you suffer because I loved my son; for the same reason you, Mildred, were content to suffer. Should he ever return to you, and no stronger or holier duty hold you back, accept him for your husband, and may God bless you both!

"When you read out this letter to my brother's son, grandson, or daughter's child, tell, also, that history and secret which you hid at your sister's death. Now that I divulge my guilt, you owe it to yourself to speak.

"I cannot address such a woman as you as a girl, no, nor even as a daughter, for you have been more to me—my consoler, my friend, and helper—the sufferer for my sins, the uncomplaining victim of my son's fickleness and cruelty. Farewell, Mildred! I leave you my honor and my name, and I sign myself,

"Truly your servant, and grateful friend,

"ARTHUR CREHYLLS TREGANOWEN."

The silvery sweet voice of Mildred ceased, and she sank back in her chair with parted lips, grasping the papers with meaningless, nervous fingers. There was a moment of deep silence, painful to the strained ear, then Mildred spoke again.

"Ralph," she said—O how low her tone fell as she uttered that name!—"when you: father recorded here his wish that I should speak of my sufferings to his brother's heiress, he could not divine she would be your daughter. Shall I speak, or be silent?"

A spasm of pain passed over my father's face.

"Speak, Mildred," he answered. "I wish Esther fully to understand how much I owe to your generosity. She comprehends now the power you have held over me through that letter of my father's, but I want her to feel there was an obligation

on my part even greater, which forced me to obey all your wishes. Surely, Mildred, Esther has something to forgive both you and me."

"Do sisters always bring each other happiness?" said Mildred, softly. "I desired above all things that the heiress of Treganowen should be happy."

Her face flushed at these words, and the old desolate ring in her voice echoed mournfully in my ear as she spoke again.

"I have always been grieved, Ralph, that you chose exile in India rather than a peaceful life in your own home—I say your *own home*, for who had so great a right to Treganowen as you, the father of its lawful heiress and the husband of Lucy, daughter of Ralph Treganowen and Barbara Polwhele his wife? Ralph, I understand your motive—it was because you would owe nothing to *me*. Esther, Mr. Tressidder will tell you that your father has refused to touch the revenues of Treganowen, which I pressed on him as his legal right as heir-at-law, for the will in reality only gives me a power of appointment. No claimant but you will ever rise to demand of me the moderate sum spent necessarily on the old mansion and gardens. This is the only disbursement, hence the accumulations are immense."

Long ago I had felt impatient, now I was trembling, burning as with a fire within me, and at the words "no claimant" I started from my seat; then, mindful that my time was not come, I sat down again, watchful and silent as before.

Mildred fixed her large eyes on me mournfully, and a quivering movement played over her lips, as though she would have said, "and you too, Esther!"—and there was a motion of her hand, as if she would have held it towards me, but she repressed it, and shading her face she began in a low voice the story of her sister's murder, and her lover's fickleness.

With what exquisite delicacy she touched on this, with what pitying, tender words she told the tale, I can never say.

"Like a ghost ever gliding nearer," she said, "like a red hand coming forth to clutch me, I felt the thought approaching that I had lost Ralph's love. I fled from it and wandered alone, crushing my sorrow. One day in the wood, by the old wishing-well of Treval, where maidens still come to whisper their hopes, I sat down disconsolate. Lost in thought I started at the sound of a rough voice, and looking up I saw a man leaning against a witch elm, watching me.

"You look wisht for a bride, Miss Tremaine," he said. "You are the one who is going to marry Mr. Ralph Treganowen?"

"Yes," I answered with my lips, while my heart said, "No, no, never."

"You think he is heir to many a good acre, don't you?"

Astonished, I simply said "Yes," without another word.

"You are mistaken; he is as good as a beggar," said the man, coarsely. "What will you give me to tell the truth? I risk my life in every word I say."

For a moment I was too bewildered to answer, but in that moment a thousand hopes rushed through my heart. "O if through this I could win back his lost love!" I thought.

"Name your price," said I.

"My life is worth as much to me as yours to you," he answered. "There are folk would kill me if they knew I had spoken to you. Give me a thousand pounds. I don't ask for payment till after I have proved the truth of my words."

I promised him this sum on that condition, and then heard for the first time the admiral's brother had left wife and children. The first was dead, but the others he could bring forward, and he threatened to do this unless well paid, and to tell them of their rights, of which he declared them now ignorant.

I hastened with this tale to Treganowen, expecting an indignant denial from the admiral, but I witnessed an old man's remorse, and I heard a terrible confession. Horror stricken, I would have left him, but he implored me for Ralph's sake, and I stayed. For his sake, too, I made the solemn promise he exacted not to tell his son till he was dead.

"Spare me," he said, "Ralph is hot-headed; he would yield up the Towers at once; he would see me and his mother cast forth in ignominy and disgrace. Oh! hide this till we are gone."

I promised, and I kept my word even when Ralph spurned me from him as a murderess.

I confess, when the admiral entreated me to see the man again, and bribe him to silence, I was not shocked. How could I bear to see a stranger take the Towers from Ralph? Moreover, the letter of the poor mutineer seemed to me only the emanation of a crazed brain seeking revenge—his children had no *legal* right, I felt sure. I was greatly confirmed in this idea when, on meeting the man again, I found he was a thief—one of a gang of thieves—and I learned that the supposed heir of Treganowen was a robber also, but he would divulge neither his name nor his abode. The man was evidently held back by some great fear. I found in common with the world in general he fancied Mr. Treganowen was drowned off Bovisand, and of course I was careful not to deceive him.

I met him often by the admiral's wish, striving to gain the truth from him—striving, perchance, more earnestly to bribe him to hide himself and his story in some distant land. He hesitated—he seemed

afraid to do either. One night he hid in terror, declaring he heard the voice of the captain. As the voices drew near I hid also, and in a moment I saw a man pass with my sister Alicia! I saw her face distinctly; his was hidden. I trembled exceedingly, frenzied with fear and horror. Long after they had passed, I still stood silent beneath the tree where I had crouched.

The man's words roused me. "Our cap'n is after high game," he said. "I wondered what we were lingering here for. I see now what's up. How would you like your sister to run away with a highway-man?"

I burst from him and ran home. I dared tell no one of this shame. I should be asked what I was doing in the wood so late. I should ruin Ralph; and to whom could I breathe a word against Alicia's honor? Not to Admonitia, so proud and pure, that she started away in disbelief if the shadow of shame touched her—not to my father—I had killed my mother, should I murder him too by this tale of his favorite daughter's villainy?—not to Ralph, surely—my story would seem to him the cruel calumny of a jealous heart. So I was silent, and I saw Ralph loving her still, till I grew mad in my misery. Then I spoke to her, I warned her, I implored her, and the fierce quarrel Mr. Winterdale partly overheard was set down to my rage and hate against her for Ralph's sake.

At last the man gave me information that would have led to the discovery of young Treganowen, but to find him would be to find a robber, to disgrace the name of Treganowen, to beggar Ralph. I would not tell the admiral of this discovery. I resolved to keep Treganowen for Ralph and his children. I had always resolved this. I have kept my resolve through murder and death, and anguish unutterable.

Mildred rose to her full height, and her large eyes dilated with joy and triumph. Again I would have started up, but the man and the signal I was expecting came not.

"I bribed the ruffian," said Mildred, "to go to America, and carry his story with him; but before I could give him the money Alicia had fled, and I was a prisoner. I was silent through all. Was I to tell that I suspected my sister was the paramour of a robber? Was I to bring the gray hairs of my father to the grave? Was I to proclaim to the world that my betrothed was enjoying rights not his? Was I to make an old man—his father, my friend—bow his head in shame, and die disgraced—a felon, the brother of a felon? Could I think of him and of Ralph cast out of the old Towers of Treganowen dishonored, and not nerve my soul to suffer all things rather than speak? I have finished," con-

cluded Mildred, abruptly. "You know the rest."

My God! how the hot iron of her martyrdom quivered through my flesh and entered my soul! I pictured to myself the old admiral granting the warrant for her arrest; I saw my father's fever of love and hate; his fury against her, his repulsion of that pure little silken hand, lovely still, true to him still, shading now the flush that crimsoned her worn cheek. I turned to my father; he had hidden his hands; but in a moment he rose, and hurried towards Miss Mildred and took her hands. Words broke from his lips incoherently, wildly—words of worship and tenderness.

"Mildred! Mildred!" he said, "O God! how you have suffered!"

To my surprise, his touch seemed to change her to a blaze of fury.

"How do you know what I have suffered? Let me go, Ralph Treganowen!" she cried, in a voice of anguish. "Your touch maddens me. You are blind—blind; you will never see the truth—never. Admonitia, help me! help me to hide from him this horror in our house. Do not let me strike him dead with it. But as you and I know it, as God knows it, so will He forgive me for the terrible revenge I take upon you and yours. No, do not think to soothe me with a touch; wait till you hear the truth, and know that I have brought hatred, dissension, and perhaps death into your house, as you did into mine."

"Esther," she turned to me more calmly, "the admiral's brother, it is true, left two children; but it is only your mother Lucy who was born after the marriage of Ralph Treganowen and Barbara Polwhele. Her brother is a robber, and illegitimate. I scorn any claim that may arise through him. Do not fear, then, that you commit an injustice by taking your inheritance."

Had my face told any thing that she said this?

"This letter, Esther, charges me to select an heir for Treganowen. I select you. I appoint you. All will be done legally. When I ring this bell, lawyers and witnesses will enter to see me sign the deed which gives you your estates. I could not bestow them on Ralph, but that they might be his child's, I induced him to marry Lucy Treganowen, winning him over to my will by the urgent commands of his father, and by touching his generosity and pity on Lucy's behalf—not telling who she really was, but as an orphan, young, forlorn, poor, unacknowledged by kindred, an unjust slur on her birth. If I have been unjust to any one it is to Lucy, in not divulging the truth to her; but she was not a woman to keep another's secret, and if money be any recompense for this slight wrong, she has had it. I thought her brother was dead when she went to India. Ralph, allying you to

him is the sole harm poor Lucy has done you."

"It is one easily forgiven," said my father.

His tone was cold, and I could see a sort of wonder on his face at Miss Mildred's change of manner.

"If he had seen Paul as I have—if he knew he was a murderer!" I thought.

"Mildred," interposed Admonitia, "you are weary; let me tell the rest. Esther, you have a sister, whose existence we have kept a secret from you all your life long. Your father's and mother's consent to this secrecy is the only price we exacted from them for all our benefits to Lucy, and for sorrows received from Ralph. You do not seem surprised or pleased. You do not know her, you cannot love her; well, it is better so, for to-morrow your happiness, when you give your hand to Stephen, will be her death-blow."

My father started from his chair, but, overpowered by emotion, speech failed him.

"It is true," said Mildred. "Ralph, your daughter Alice loves Stephen Tremaine, and I return into your bosom some of the anguish you have brought to this house. Until I could show you the depths of hell in sister's hearts when jealousy comes between them, I would not see your face."

"Mildred—Esther?" cried my father, as, staggering beneath her words, he caught me by the hand.

"Esther," continued Miss Mildred, in the calm voice of gratified vengeance, "I have not sinned against you. I have guarded *your* peace. To-morrow, lovely and beloved, you will leave happily with your husband. Your father will never witness the strife and misery he brought here; he will only see the anguish of *one* daughter; he will only see Alice grieve, and pine, and die."

"And she will not be *murdered*!" cried Admonitia with flashing eyes.

"Hush!" said Mildred, gently. "Esther"—and her voice sank to a tender whisper—"you do not care for this sister; surely I have not marred your happiness by my *justice*. You love Stephen, and you have won his heart from Alice by your beauty and genius. Enjoy your victory and your wealth, and let Alice weep, or laugh, grow hard and perish, what is it to you?"

"She is my sister," said I, softly. "Oh God! will he never come," I cried inwardly.

But here the passion of my heart broke forth, and violently releasing myself from my father's trembling grasp, I sprang forward, crying—

"Miss Mildred, a few moments ago I pitied you—I loved you. Now I hate you! Listen! I knew days ago I had a sister—a twin sister—from whom in your far-seeing plot of vengeance you parted me. And you have made me your tool to stab her and my father to the heart, but your weapon

fails you. This day I parted with Stephen Tremaine forever, and Alice will never know he loved me. I refuse to be his wife! I utterly scorn him. I would not take his fickle hand in mine for worlds, warm as it is with a sister's clasp. I stifle at the thought; and I refuse to accept Treganowen. It is not mine; it belongs to Hubert Treganowen, the son of my mother's *legitimate* brother."

As the fire of my passion poured from my eyes and lips, as my burning words streamed over her, Miss Mildred sank slowly to the floor, and clasping her forehead with one hand, she gazed at me wildly.

"The work of so many years destroyed," she murmured—"this heir whom I have sought not to discover, but to hide, found. Ralph's child will not have Treganowen! What is this? There is a fire in my brain—I am going mad. Oh, Esther, am I thwarted and disappointed in all my hopes?"

She sank lower, and bowed her head on Admonitia's knees.

I did not answer, I did not heed her. I was clinging to my father.

"Yes, yes, I have seen Alice. Reassure yourself—there is no dissension, no hate, no grief; my love is gone like a summer cloud—what if it leave a little rain, a few tears, they will not harm me. Let Treganowen go to its rightful owner;" and I wrung my hands because Hubert was so good, so generous, and I so fickle, so unworthy, he would never love me again—never—never. "Oh, come away! Let us leave this wicked woman who fancied because she had lied and plotted to save your lands, that we should accept her gifts and endure her vengeance. Come away, my father, and leave her to God."

Slowly Miss Mildred had raised her bowed head, and listened to my incoherent words; her face was deadly pale, her heart seemed broken.

"Esther!" she said, and her desolate cry rang through the room, "I have loved you!"

There was no time for answer. There was the hurried tramp of feet, the sound of voices, then the door was thrust open, and Mr. Winterdale, Mr. Tressider, and two others entered. There was something in their aspect which arrested the breath on the lips and turned the heart cold.

"Miss Mildred Tremaine," said Mr. Winterdale, as he laid his hand on her shoulder. "I arrest you on the charge of concealing your sister Alicia a prisoner in this house. Here is our warrant to search the mansion of Treval from roof to cellar."

"It is come," answered Mildred, with the calmness and pallor of death. "Who is the traitor?—who is my accuser?"

"Esther Treganowen!" responded Mr. Winterdale, in a tone of triumph.

With eyes blazing with ire and scorn, Miss Admonitia turned towards me.

"How could dishonor and disgrace and treachery touch the house of Tremaine save through a Treganowen?" she said.

Sorrow and amazement kept me dumb, for the moment I was accused my father thrust me roughly from him, and strode to the side of Miss Mildred.

"If Esther has brought this wild, wicked accusation against you, Mildred, she is no daughter of mine," he cried.

"It is Esther," said Mr. Winterdale, as he clutched me by the arm. "This girl—my tool—the weapon by which I have ripped open this vile wickedness—Esther the SOMNAMBULIST!"

## CHAPTER I.

LIKE an electric shock his words rushed through my brain, and turning deadly pale, I sprang forward, and should have fallen, but for the cruel grasp upon my arm which held me up.

"Ah," said Mr. Winterdale, "here is the instrument by which I have tracked this woman's guilt, step by step, home to her hearth and her heart; this slight, fragile girl, who has done it unwittingly and unwillingly. At times I have despaired, for till she came down here again to the air of this dungeon, her disease took only such shapes as were worthless to me—music, drawings, song; but *now*—" and he drew forth from his pocket a manuscript, the very manuscript the old ghost-layer hid from me every night!—"now," and his voice roared in triumph, "I have the whole history under the somnambulist's hand. See! she names it the history of that 'Blank Time Spent at Treval,' when it seems, as a child, laboring under another phase of that mysterious disease, of which I have taken advantage to track out this secret, these cruel jailers availed themselves of the strange, rare powers of genius, and of song developed in her then, to soothe their unhappy prisoner."

"Gentlemen, what need of delay? A search is unnecessary; this manuscript tells us the secret of the red room, and points out the entrance to the prison."

"I am here as the Misses Tremaine's solicitor," observed Mr. Tressidder. "I claim to see the search-warrant before I permit any one to take a single step from this room."

It was shown to him, and then it appeared it was granted at the instance of Mr. Winterdale and Dominica. As I heard her name read out, I divined at once that she had followed me in my strange sleep and seen the spot, not where the ghost-layer, but where I, with my own hands, bound in the

chains of mysterious slumber, had hidden my history.

Long before Mr. Winterdale had ceased to speak, Mildred's lips uttered softly the words, "My poor Esther!" and my arms were clasped around her, and I was weeping bitterly, forgetting alike her vengeance and her guilt, ere his speech was done.

And now Mr. Winterdale with fierce eagerness led the way, and we all followed. I held Miss Mildred's hand—had she been a murderess I must have held it—she rested her other hand on my father's arm. He was incredulous, proud, scornful, she only sorrowful, with a gleam of joy in her eyes like the martyr's at the crowning stroke. Up the great staircase, through the corridor, past the chambers from whose long line of windows I had looked down on the cedar-tree, we hurried with rapid step. Faster and faster beat my heart as we neared Miss Mildred's chamber. When we entered the sitting-room she looked round it, like one bidding a last farewell, and I shuddered as I said, "She is thinking of the prison where she will soon lie, shut out from the pure air, the light, the beauty, the home of this dear place." As the thought came and went, we passed down the steps, and entered the pretty chamber, so purely white, so freshly green, where this pale, strange, still woman, silent and self-resolved, had hidden her secret so long.

Martha was there, and looked around upon us with an amazed air, blanching suddenly to fear.

"It is finished," said Mildred softly; and at her words the old servant fell into a chair and covered her face.

"Good heavens! I exclaimed to myself, 'is there any mystery *here*?—in this simple chamber!—Are we all mad?'"

Mr. Winterdale was looking at my unhappy narrative, which fluttered in his nervous hand.

"Remove the steps!" he said.

Then a thrill of fear shot through me, which passed like an electric flash through every stander-by, as Dominica, directed by Mr. Winterdale, stooped, and pulled aside the three polished steps which formed the descent from the sitting room to the chamber. They masked a small arched passage, which looked strangely drear in the falling dusk. There was no time for thought, for speech; crowding on each other and breathless we entered, and in a moment found ourselves in a long, low chamber, nearly dark. We left day, and the last golden glow of a stormy sunset in Miss Mildred's room, and here we came upon the night. For a moment we scarcely saw each other's faces, and the place appeared empty and silent, then there grew out of the gloom, crouching towards us in the old terrible attitude, the pale, worn profile I had watched from the cedar-tree; the white, woe-begone face



I had seen on the roof. With frightened, helpless look she came, like one not strong in sense, and alas! blind—stone-blind!—listening, turning her head from side to side, groping with her hands she came, while every voice, every breath was still, and every eye in horror followed her movements.

At last with outstretched fingers she touched Mildred's robe, then a smile—so strange and sweet, so wondrously changing the death-white face—broke over her lips.

"Is it only you?" she said. "Mildred, my Mildred, is it only you?"

Tears, hot, fast, scalding tears, the first I had ever seen on that proud cheek, fell from Mildred's eyes, then she drew the blind, crouching figure to her breast, gently as we draw a child.

"Alicia! my poor Alicia!" she said, but her voice broke, and for a single moment through the gathering storm and darkness not a sound was heard. Then Miss Admonitia broke the silence, and not a falter shook the ring of her clear, patrician voice as she spoke—

"Gentlemen, you have laid bare the secret of our house, and the cruel martyrdom of my sister Mildred. I am glad of it. She will be relieved now from the long, loathsome misery inflicted on her by a mad impostor."

At these words the poor worn figure, clinging to Mildred, turned her face hopelessly to the voice, and then, with the caressing action of the blind, laid her hand on Mildred's cheek and felt the tears.

"Not for me, Mildred," she said hurriedly. "Oh, not for me, who have made you suffer so much. I do not head Admonitia's disbelief—am I not used to it? What has happened?—who are here?—strangers?"

"I repeat impostor," continued Admonitia, in a firmer tone. "A woman who has known how to work on Mildred's weakness by all the details she heard from Alicia when she was in the hands of robbers, a woman who saw her slain—who is doubtless criminal as the thieves, her companions. Take her, gentlemen. It will be a day of joy for me when this blind, pitiable object, who, walking in the fear of death from her accomplices, dared come hither praying to be hidden from the world—shall cease to wither my heart, and turn my blood to fire, by her assumption of Alicia's name. Mildred, will you never be undeceived? Ralph, speak! tell her that it is only her eyes that see, in this poor, blind, half-idiot cripple, Alicia Tremaine."

My father might have spoken, but Mr. Winterdale broke in with cool, sarcastic voice—

"You are a clever woman, Miss Admonitia. How did this impostor come hither?"

"She came in the dead of night, and,

standing by Mildred's bed, dared claim her help, and call herself Alicia Tremaine. From the real Alicia, from that poor girl murdered in her presence, she had doubtless learned the secret of this old, useless, long-forgotten room."

The pride, the contempt in Admonitia's voice had turned another man to stone, but Mr. Winterdale simply said—

"A clever tale. Gentlemen, let us do our duty. The officers wait below to remove the prisoner. Miss Mildred, it is a long drive to Bodmin jail, and the night is stormy; instant departure is best."

As he finished his cruel speech, and ere the low cry that rose to my lips had burst from them, a door opened at the end of the long, low room—a door I had not noticed in the obscurity—and a man's face looked within. Coming from the outer light on the darkness, his eyes wore a dazed, bewildered expression, changing suddenly to fear and desperation as he saw the crowd. But before I could understand that this was the man for whom I had waited so long that night, before I could even see him with my full sense, Mr. Winterdale rushed towards him, exclaiming—

"Ah, villain!—have I got you at last? Have I hunted you through the world to find you *here*? Clear the blot from Alicia's name. Give me the certificate of her marriage!"

"I will not be taken alive. Stand back!" shouted the man. "I fire at the foremost! Who is this? Have the dead risen?"

Something gleamed in his hand as he spoke, and—O God! the poor, worn figure they called Alicia Tremaine, shrieking at the sound of his voice, rushed by as if to hide, and passed his pistol, in her blindness not knowing it, nor comprehending the danger, the death that menaced her.

With a bitter cry Miss Mildred sprang before her.

"Hold your hand, Paul Polwhale!" she cried, "Will you murder your wife!"

It was too late, or, perchance, her very words caused the deed, for the pistol flashed in the robber's hand, and she fell like one dead, while the pale figure of Alicia passed on scathless.

Blinded by tears, anguish, horror, I leaned over Miss Mildred, and strove to raise her, while Miss Admonitia, like one bereft of reason, knelt by her side, aiding me, but my father, dashing us aside, took her in his arms and laid her on the bed standing dimly in the gloom like a bier near us.

"Oh God! is she much hurt?" whispered Admonitia.

It was a whisper to be heard in the very blood, and at the sound Mildred opened her eyes. Her looks, her words, deceived us.

"Not much," she said gently. "I shall soon be well. Ralph, you will forgive me my vengeance now you have seen Alicia.

Look—that is what insisterly strife and hate have made her! That is what I have had before my eyes so many burning years. I never thought to show it to you—this fruit of hate and passion. O God! do men know what they do, when by loving two sisters they put fire from the pit into their hearts?"

"Not now, my dear Mildred," said my father: "we will not speak of these things now. Who is gone for a surgeon?"

"She speaks strongly; she is not much hurt," murmured Admonitia, gladly. "Oh! do not hold that wretched woman's hand now, Mildred. You see Ralph feels she is not Alicia."

For answer, Mildred turned and kissed the woe-worn woman on the brow; while she, holding out her hand with a gray and troubled look, said in the tone of one long accustomed to disbelief—

"Ralph Treganowen, I am indeed Alicia."

Then, as if the unwonted excitement was too much for her weak sense, she shrank down, cowering at Mildred's feet in silence.

"See!" cried Admonitia with a shudder, "how to gain shelter and safety here she works upon a noble heart, inflicting a torture of which her base nature cannot dream."

"Esther!" cried the voice of Paul, hoarsely, "you know the truth, tell it. God knows I am sorry for this; I never thought to hurt Miss Mildred. Men! let me pass. I am desperate!"

Who had thought of the assassin? No hand had seized him. And now he was gone. I heard a cry, a rush of feet, but I could not look. My eyes were filled with a mist of tears, for I saw a gray, cold shadow creeping over Mildred's face, and I knew its name was death. She put out her hand feebly, groping for some one's touch. Was it for me?—for my father? No, it was for Admonitia.

Strangling with emotion, crushed with grief, the tall, stately woman knelt by the bed, choked with sobs.

"Admonitia," said Mildred, in a voice faint, low, dying, as taking her hand she laid it on Alicia's head, "promise me ere I go, that to you this poor, worn spirit shall never be an impostor more, but your sister—your veritable sister. Esther, I leave her to you. Ralph, I have sinned much, but not as Mr. Winterdale thinks. Admonitia, there are papers—in my desk—for Ralph—Esther."

Then with dying energy, with a stronger voice, as we withdrew from her lips the wine with which we wetted them, she cried—

"Save Alicia from her husband."

"Oh, Miss Mildred!" I sobbed, "do not die thinking your sister is Paul's wife, or, worse, his victim. Let me give you one

gleam of joy. She is the wife of my mother's legitimate brother—she is the wife of Alan Treganowen."

At the sound of my words a cry broke from Alicia's lips.

"Alan! Alan! My child?" she said wildly. "Will you let Paul destroy my child?"

My lips trembled exceedingly as I pressed them to Miss Mildred's hand, and forced myself to speak.

"Your son is safe," I said. "Mr. Winterdale has been to him as a father. Hubert is good, noble; worthy, indeed, of the ancient towers and the inheritance over which we have all fought so long."

A deep sadness, darker than death, shadowed Miss Mildred's face. I put my ear to her lips. I heard her faint words—

"Esther, you think to give me joy. You wither my last hopes. I have sinned, suffered in vain. Treganowen is lost to Ralph forever."

O God! what would I not have given to have been able to say—"No, no, Miss Mildred! Hubert loves me. In his far-seeing generosity he determined to be, not my father's enemy, but his son; not the legal despoiler making me penniless, but the tender friend, lover, husband, who should make me rich—richest of all in his love."

I could not say it. I was entirely unworthy now. I could never run to Hubert's breast for shelter again. Miss Mildred had made me her tool—made me love Stephen, and the scarlet thread that marred the fair web of her life—the desire for vengeance—saddened her death, and tied my faltering tongue.

Utterly broken hearted that I could not give her this joy, that I must let her die in her sorrow without one gleam of hope, I looked at her and cried—

"Mildred! Mildred!"

My father could not speak. With his arm around her, with his eyes fastened on her face, he held even her last breath greedily, keeping us from her side.

"No, no," said Mildred faintly to her sister and Martha, who were striving to stanch the blood from her wound, "let me be. You pain me; let me die without pain. I have had so much pain—so much pain in my life."

At touch of the blood-stained linen which Martha drew gently away, some sense of the truth awoke in the unhappy Alicia's dimmed mind.

"She is dying for me?" she said, as a great horror came into her face; "but has she not been dying for me all her life long?"

As she spoke I saw my father shrink away from her with pain and disgust. I saw him fix his eyes on Mildred's pale face, then he stooped and kissed her, and as her lips broke into a smile of joy she died.

## CHAPTER LI.

"GENTLEMEN," said Miss Admonitia—and no faltering marred her clear intonation, no stoop in her stately form—"your prisoner has escaped you. My sister is dead. As for the poor creature whom she has succored so long, I ask you to let her remain at Treval, for I have promised"—there was a quiver here, a pathos all the more deep because it struggled so hard for strength—"never to call her imposter more. I wish to be kind to her, and protect her to the end, out of respect to the strong belief my Mildred held that she is indeed Alicia Tremaine. Mr. Tresidder, I can rely on you. Lord Roscorla"—Admonitia turned to the magistrate who had accompanied Mr. Winterdale—"I ask of you a favor. For the sake of my two sisters, both brought to a violent death through the changes in the hot heart of Ralph Treganowen, I entreat you to keep secret the fact that this poor outcast usurps Alicia's name. Let my murdered sisters sleep in peace. I shall soon follow them. Do not harass my last days by tearing from the silence of the grave all the sorrowful history these deaths cover."

"Miss Tremaine," answered Lord Roscorla in a tone of deep pity, "if the assassin of your sister be taken, nothing can keep this story from being known. And then I fear your share in the crime of this long concealment of this person—whether she be Alicia Tremaine or no—will be proved against you. For myself I believe your motives pure, but the world may think otherwise. Can I help you?" Lowering his voice, "Will you leave England?"

"No," said Miss Admonitia, turning proudly away.

I had heard that in youth Lord Roscorla had loved Miss Admonitia, but she had refused him because of the sorrow and shame at Treval, which she was too proud to let another share.

He followed her now anxiously.

"If I can keep this secret," he said, earnestly, "I will. Escape, Admonitia," he added softly; "there is no warrant out against you, and your sister is beyond human justice."

"I have wronged no one," answered Admonitia, with mournful pride. "Mildred and I succored, cherished, nursed for years a poor wanderer, demented and blind—that is our crime. And we hid her because she called herself Alicia Tremaine. Could we let our sister's fame be given to the winds, or permit a woman calling herself by her name to perish in a ditch?"

Thus spoke Miss Admonitia—proud to the last, willing still to be a martyr or a criminal for the honor of the Tremaines.

"Where is Mr. Winterdale?" said I, speaking through my tears. "I have a narrative, given me by Paul Polwhele, which he must

read. Fetch him, Lord Roscorla, I entreat you."

We had all quitted the chamber of death, and were standing in Miss Mildred's sitting-room when I spoke.

"Mr. Winterdale is not here," answered Mr. Tresidder. "He has pursued the assassin, with some of the servants. It seems he took advantage of our sudden horror to escape by some secret way to the garden. A man saw him emerge from a little staircase behind some window below, but, paralyzed by alarm, failed to seize him. I fear he has escaped altogether."

Mr. Tresidder's fears were true. Paul got safely to the village of Trevala by the sea; there a woman gathering limpets saw him get into a little boat evidently awaiting him, and through the darkness and storm that had lashed Treval through all this dreadful day and night he pushed off from the rock-bound beach. Panting, furious, having distanced his companions, the man who had pursued him so many years tracked his steed, and too impatient to wait for aid, seeing Paul's tiny skiff in the gleam of the stormy moon, he launched a fisherman's boat lying on the shore and followed in pursuit.

It was a fearful night, but what mattered darkness or storm to this relentless hunter of men? He who had tracked down Miss Mildred through so many cruel, remorseless, slowly winding paths, was resolved now to lay his hand on Paul Polwhele.

Through all that night—a night to be remembered forever—we waited for tidings. None came. No eye ever saw, no ear ever heard aught more of those two men. God alone knows what happened, or whether they met, but on the gloomy evening of the second day after Mildred's death, the sullen waves subsiding in their fury cast upon the shore the body of Paul Polwhele. He was buried in the churchyard of Trevala, but no voice dared read a sacred word over his grave. Mr. Winterdale was never seen again alive or dead.

And now, having brought my story thus far, it is time I laid before you that narrative of Paul's of which I have spoken; but as I find the paper, alluded to by Miss Mildred, will render the former clearer and more comprehensible, I transcribe this, the first. I have called it—

## MILDRED'S CONFESSION.

## MILDRED'S CONFESSION.

FOUND IN HER DESK BY ESTHER TREGANOWEN.

"When I looked upon the face of the murdered girl brought to the north porch, I knew she was *not* my sister Alicia. But I saw my father recover from a death-sickness in the tranquillity of that belief; I saw Admonitia relieved and thankful; the hot search, the fever of suspense, the anguish of

hope were over, and I hesitated to speak my doubts. Moreover, was there not a hope now that Ralph, thinking she was dead, would come back to me—me, whose heart bled for him? If, too, this were Alicia, the world would see I had had no hand in her death; the persecution, the trial, the prison, the torture would be spared me; my father's gray hairs would be saved from the grave; Mr. Winterdale would relax his vengeance; and Ralph would be *sorry for me*; while if this were *not* Alicia, a horrible complication was added to the mystery, and I was still a prisoner. I held my peace. I ask for no pity. I was a coward, and I know it. But I was a coward for Ralph. I was afraid that I should not have strength to bear the loneliness of the prison, the torture of trial, and the load of hate and suspicion around me; I had not power for more suffering. I was breaking down now; stretched longer on the rack I should tell my secret, and disgrace the family of Treganowen, and make Ralph a beggar and an exile.

"Now the sight of Ralph's face, though it looked upon me with horror, gave me courage, but in prison I could see him no more, and the loneliness and the pain would force me to speak. Would to Heaven I could feel surer of myself, but I did not! Under Ralph's hate my spirit was sinking, and I dared not thrust myself into further suffering.

"Then I tried to persuade myself that this poor corpse was Alicia—the real Alicia. Had I not seen her myself with one of the ruffian gang, and what more likely than this, that, deceived, dishonored, betrayed, she had at last been murdered! She went willingly, I knew; but who would believe me now if I said so? To all the world—even to Admonitia—I should seem like one inventing a slanderous tale to screen herself from suspicion. Moreover, I *could not* inflict such shame and pain upon my father and Ralph. My tongue would have scorched me had I tried. And surely this was, this must be Alicia; to doubt was to ruin all dear to me.

"Thus I quieted my conscience, and asked myself why my eyes alone saw in this girl the face of a stranger, while others rained down tears on her and cried, 'Oh Alicia! Alicia!'

"Once when Mrs. Treganowen said sorrowfully that I was either hard of heart, or else cruelly glad that my sister was dead, else I should surely weep for her, I ventured to hint to her my doubt. But I seemed to her like one that was mad, or like a heartless woman excusing herself for a crime by falsehood.

"Alicia's death set me free, saved the Treganowens, gave me hope. God forgive me that I stifled the truth, arrayed myself in black, went to the funeral, and looked

sorrowful as for a sister! Still, when I saw this girl—a stranger—laid in the vault of the Tremaines—when I saw Ralph fling himself down in grief, my heart melted like wax within me, and but for the dead faintness into which I fell, I should have proclaimed the truth aloud. Restored to consciousness, I met Mr. Winterdale's eyes gazing down into mine, and the horrible thought struck me that he knew what I knew, and felt what I felt. But he was silent, and I could only shudder and be silent also.

"The admiral died, racked by pride and the fear of disgrace to the last. His will gave me all power, and I resolved to use it, not to find his brother's heir, but to keep Treganowen for Ralph. The man who knew the secret was dead, the children of Barbara he swore were ignorant of their rights—let them perish, so Ralph kept his inheritance, how could I care?

"For two years I was left tranquil, save for sad thoughts, then anonymous letters reached me demanding money on pain of divulging the sin and sorrow hidden by Alicia's death. The writer averred that she had fled willingly with a robber, and that her hand alone had admitted the gang to Treval. She called herself a wife, but this was false, he said, and unless I would bring dishonor on the name of Tremaine I must buy his secrecy by money. I showed these letters to Admonitia, thinking that now, at least, the suspicion would arise in her mind that no man would write thus unless Alicia were still living, still dishonoring us all. But no, she treated the letters with utter scorn and disbelief, although the bare suspicion of such a shame, and her love and pity for me, made her steadfastly refuse the man she loved.

"Three years passed, and Ralph returned to me wiser and sadder, repentant and sorrowful. I scarcely dared believe in his renewed love. I scarcely dared think I could be happy. He had come to me because he was impatient, moody, restless, and I alone comprehended him; I alone knew the secrets of his family and the secrets of his heart. He talked continually of Alicia—to him I saw she was a martyred angel—pure, beautiful, too good for earth. But she was dead, and next to her he loved me. Strangely enough, he said, through all his passion for her he had loved me—loved me, calmly, dearly—and this love continued till he suspected me of—he dared not say the word murder, so he stopped.

"If she were living still, should you love me? I asked.

"Do not ask me that again, Mildred," he answered; "my heart throbs at the thought with such sick pain that I cannot bear it."

"I knew Alicia lived, and yet in my craving love I half resolved to be Ralph's wife, and keep the secret of my passionate

heart from him forever. 'If she conceals herself for this robber's sake, may I do nothing for Ralph's sake?' I asked myself.

"I did not at this time show him his father's letter, only he guessed that the will—which never vexed him—hid rather than expressed his father's wishes. One day he even said he thought the admiral had left Treganowen to me, because he knew we should marry, and he asked me if this were not the secret of the will.

"I knew his father had told him the true circumstances of his uncle's death, and now I ventured to suggest he might have left children, but the hint angered him almost to fury.

"My uncle was mad,' he said, 'and if he wrote such a thing to my father, it was the thought of a diseased brain longing for revenge.'

"I seized on this idea eagerly. What more likely to strike the poor madman than such a plot as this to destroy his brother's peace? How was it I had not thought of this before?

"My father wrote to me just before his death, Mildred,' said Ralph, 'begging me to return to Treganowen. If his brother had left children with legal claims would he have said this? No. And he knew that leaving the Towers to you was leaving them to me.'

"The generosity, the largeness of heart with which Ralph had borne this apparently cruel will, and the ingenuousness of spirit with which he had come back to me when narrow minds would have feared misinterpretation, or nourished resentment, touched me to the soul. Never once did he suspect me—never once did he think I should suspect him—of mercenary feelings. Yet he loved Treganowen, and he owned that love candidly, saying simply—

"My father left our old Towers to you because he knew no other woman but you could be my wife, no other man but I could be your husband. He did it to show his trust in us, but, above all, in you, and his belief in the affection that existed still, beneath that great storm of passion for Alicia, that wrecked my peace.'

"Then I said, in my hot, sorrow-flooded heart, 'I will marry Ralph—I will hide his father's letter—he shall have Treganowen—there are no heirs—the hanged man was mad—and the robber who met me in the wood was a liar.'

"I had always slept in the red room where the brothers had fought, and the Puritan had stabbed the Cavalier to the heart. I had ever persisted in the true tale, that Alicia had entered this room and come to my bedside on the night of her disappearance. Admonitia had endeavored to persuade me this was a dream, and finding me persist in my assertion, she strove to induce me to change my room. I did

not yield to this wish. I had a superstitious fancy that if Alicia were living she would come to me here.

"Connected with the legend of the red room was a tradition that the Cavalier had been hidden at Treval by his sister in some secret chamber, and although apparently none existed, I had faith in the tradition.

"One evening, in spite of my hidden sorrows, and, above all, the aching fear that Ralph had only returned to me because he thought Alicia dead, I was happy, for I had parted with him tenderly, and with a smile on my lips, I sat down on a couch by my fireside in the red room, and dreamed away the hours in love dreamings. Door after door had closed at a distance, and footsteps died into silence, and the house grew strangely still, then I became conscious that it was late—very late; and a shivering fear and loneliness crept over me, and these holding me like a spell, I could not rouse myself to undress, but sat gazing at the wall opposite fixedly like one expecting a spectre. As I gazed, there grew a shadow on it never there before, and with the shadow a gentle grating sound; then, as I live, I saw the steps slowly moving outwards, and in the dark space they left there stood a crouching figure—the figure of a woman—unwomanly, bowed, and broken, dreadful to the sight. No shriek burst from my lips. I said to myself, 'My hour is come: I knew she was living—I knew she would come again to mar my short-lived happiness.' And before she had uttered a word, my hollow voice had whispered—

"Alicia, is it you?

"Creeping, groping towards me, like one bereft of senses—like one bowed down by grief and pain unutterable—she came and fell down at my feet speechless, her hands clasped together, famine, anguish, patience on her face.

"I stooped over her, I lifted her in my arms; she was cold and wet; her garments were ragged, travel-stained, dreadful to the touch. Terror, loathing, pity kept me silent, as I laid her on the couch, and gazed on her like one turned to stone. There was something strange about her—something more pitiful still than even the misery into which she had fallen—and, looking on her, I was wondering what that something was, when she spoke—

"Mildred, I am blind!

"I fell upon my knees, for there was no strength left in me at her words. I strove to speak—no voice came to my lips. In the breathless silence she heard my fall, and stretched out her hand upon me.

"Mildred, are you faint?

"No.' I held my heart tightly with my hands, that the flood of pity rushing into it might not kill me; but when I felt her fingers passing over my face with the groping action peculiar to the blind, my heart broke

with sorrow, and from that moment began my living death.

"'I am not worth weeping for,' she said in a low voice. 'Give me food, Mildred; I am faint.'

"Looking upon her worn face, so horribly changed, so meaningless in its blindness, so haggard in its suffering, I read famine and misery in every line.

"Mildred, I have begged my way hither from Bristol," she said

"I rose from my knees. 'I will fetch you something,' I answered hurriedly, for her words were a knife in my side; 'but I fear I must take the light and leave you in the dark.'

"Leave me in the dark! Oh, Mildred, where is there any light for me now?"

"O God! what a desolate cry was hers! I passed through years of pain as I heard it, and every nerve thrilled and quivered beneath the soft, low accent of her voice.

"Silently and like a thief I crept through the house and fetched her food and wine, and piteously she held her cup to my lips, with dumb entreaty imploring me to eat and drink with her. I understood her—we do not break bread with an enemy—so I tasted the bread and wine. I took that sacrament of forgiveness with her, and now for the first time tears rained down from her darkened eyes and from mine—mine less blessed in that they saw this pitiable sight. I would fain have put her into my bed, but she would not lie there.

"Let me stay here by the fire," she said; 'I could not sleep there, Mildred.'

"She sank to sleep suddenly, just after I had arrayed her in clean white linen from my wardrobe, and no sooner did she slumber than a great longing seized upon me to walk through the house and arouse all the sleepers, and tell them that Alicia—the woman whose corpse they had laid in the vault at Trevalla—was here alive, haunting my chamber with a terrible likeness of herself—blind—fearful—maddening me. But I struggled with this desire and trampled it down, knowing that if I awoke them in the dead of night with such news I should seem to them as one who raved. No, I must hear her story, and gather my evidence, together before I could force belief upon them. And I would do it. I would brave the shock, the horror, the amazement to my father, the pain to Admonitia, for should they deem this poor wanderer an impostor, a mad woman, would not the fault be mine, because in my cowardice and my love for Ralph I held my tongue when they placed yonder poor corpse in the church among the Tremaines who sleep by the sea?

"Thus thinking, I locked my door and waited for the morning.

"Let not any one dream that this night to me was alive with horror and anguish. No! it was dead—every thing was dead—there

was no life in or around me. And in the darkness of that death the shadow of a second sight came down upon me, and I saw and knew all I had to suffer; and yet not feeling it, I sat in heavy stupor while the hours tolled dolefully for my departed spirit, and the wild bells at Trevalla rang out my requiem to the stormy sea.

"I had forgotten it was New Year's eve till the bells awoke me with a clash like a death-shriek, then I knew that sorrow and I had begun the year together, in pale companionship with this buried woman lying there, pallid in the fitful light of my fading fire. Morning came at last, bringing life again, but not the life of yesterday; that could never come more to me. It was a death-life now that moved me—no joy, no love, no peace, no bounding throbs in my aching veins now—only suffering, suffering—O my God! only suffering!

"Mildred! Mildred! a happy new year!" cried the voice of Ralph under my window. 'Say, am I the first to wish it?'

"At the sound of his voice I started to my feet and threw my arms wildly upwards. I dared not go to the window; there was something too terrible on my face. Human nature cannot endure to see the aspect some sufferings take. In very pity we must not let a fellow-mortal gaze upon the features despair and horror wear; instinctively we hide it when our pain grows too mighty for our fleshy mask. And so, although he could not see me, I covered my face with my mantle, and waited in silence, till, weary of calling, he wandered down the lawn, deeming me asleep or careless.

"Hide me away," said Alicia, pitifully, as she awoke. 'I cannot let Admonitia or my father see me. O Mildred! if you will not consent to hide me, I will say I am a beggar-woman, and I will go out on the moor and die.'

"I can do any thing for you," I said to myself as I looked at her, 'save let Ralph love you again.'

"Then I thought of his words, and the sick throb at his heart when I hinted she might be living, and I deemed it better to hide her lest she should kindle up the old flame again, and make me hate her as in the bitter days of our strife.

"Jealousy is a consuming fire, in whose light shadows grow to giants. And yet in the morning sun I saw the change sin and suffering had wrought in her. It was not only that she was blind, and haggard, and worn, but the crouching gait, the something terrible in her attitude which I had marked from the first, now struck me with a strange shiver, for I saw it arose from some injury or fall she had received.

"How did it happen?" said I, softly.

"I was escaping, and in my blindness fell from a great height. They took me up crushed, broken out of all humanity, and I

lay for months in one of their haunts, scarcely sensible, I think. When I recovered, I was as you see me now.'

"And your poor eyes?" said I.

"I think I wept them away. I can scarcely tell when I first found them growing dim. I think it was after my little boy was born that gradually a film came over them which blinded me.'

"And where is your child?" How the word choked me, knowing its father was a robber, and its mother not a wife.

"I can't tell—no, I can't tell even you," answered Alicia, wildly. "They ceased to watch me; they thought the blind cripple had no hope of deliverance; they forgot that I was a mother. I saved my boy, not myself; I could not let him be a thief, Mildred."

"But at this point Alicia grew incoherent, then silent and apathetic, and I saw with new anguish that her mind was shaken, or, rather, dulled, crushed down and content now to remain inactive. Thus it was, with many questions and much pain, I dragged from her the history of her life. She did not care to tell it; she seemed to care for nothing. Such she was on the day after she came to me—such she is now, with apparently no desire for aught on earth. She never laughs, and seldom speaks save when I or Martha force her; and then, though a moment before a looker-on might deem her mind quite gone, she answers with such sense and reason that I often fancy it is only the will, the power to act, which lies maimed and injured within her brain, while thought remains untouched and clear."

"In brief narrative this is her story:—She had met in Paris a young man, gay and handsome, who pleased her. She scarcely knew if she loved him, but she listened to him there, and listened still more when he followed her to London. But here she met Ralph, to whom she was first attracted by his turn of feature, his tone of voice somewhat resembling her unknown and mysterious lover. No thought of supplanting me had then entered her heart. Ralph talked of me often, but harshly, unkindly, and she thought he did not love me. She chatted, she sang, she coquetted, she never dreamed of taking his heart away; but at length

letters from home, speaking of him as my affianced husband, awoke her to the truth. She spoke to him of me; he answered madly with wild words of love for her. She broke away from him, and in her own room, on the table, she found a letter from the lover to whose vows she had listened a few short weeks ago. She dared not ask herself whom she loved of these two; something whispered it was Ralph, her sister's lover, but she would not hear the voice. She wrote to the address given her, and recklessly agreed to a meeting.

"When they met she contrasted him with Ralph, and although he seemed gayer, wittier, handsomer, yet there was something wanting in his bearing and manners which Ralph had, and which gave Ralph the advantage. Still she was not ill-pleased to hear there was a chance of her seeing him at Bath, whither she was going.

"Alicia was very young; if she were a coquette, if the power of her beauty, and the delight she felt in pleasing and being pleased, caused her to err, I remembering her sufferings, will not dare to pass judgment on her.

"The stranger, whose air of romance and mystery charmed her, came not to Bath; but Ralph followed her thither in hot haste and passion. Then Alicia resolved to come home: not that she was frightened; she was too gay, too inexperienced, too ignorant of the depths in the heart to feel fear. The young think they may cross a torrent, edge a precipice, or play with fire, and not be hurt. Oh the sorrow caused by the foolish who mean no harm! As a child sets a curtain idly in a blaze, not foreseeing the end of his work, so had she created in the hearts of two—nay, of three—men a flame that was to devour their lives, their honor, their happiness.

"Her presence at Treganowen was the beginning of strife and sorrow too bitter for me to touch on. With her gay nature—kindly, thoughtless, soft—she could not understand Admonitia's and my grave ways and speech. We spoke harshly, I own it, when we should have soothed this poor young creature, whose imprudence had already fastened a deadly coil around her. She came to Treganowen meaning to tell us all, but our ways were not her ways, and she was frozen into silence. Hatred, enmity, made a breach between us, which bitter words widened every day. At times she thought she would marry Ralph, and she looked hourly for him to ask her; and wondered why he had not courage to break with me. Then her father took up her cause; and seeing Ralph's heart gone from me, he thought it useless to kick against the pricks, but straightway went to the Admiral and proposed that Alicia should be his son's bride. To the surprise of all, Ralph refused; then Alicia felt a strange emptiness come

<sup>1</sup> NOTE BY ESTHER.—In the cerebellum, or supplementary brain, resides exclusively a property which consists in the power of *co-ordinating the movements* willed by the cerebrum, or greater brain; hence, if the cerebellum were slightly diseased, a person in perfect reason would find it difficult to use any exertion or form of locomotion. Silence, apathy, inertness, would be the characteristics of his state. This would account for the submission and indifference with which the unfortunate mother of Hubert bore her long imprisonment and concealment. Doubtless, her great desire to save her child and to reach Treval gave her brain power over the inert cerebellum for a time, but these things accomplished, it sank at once into inactivity.

over her heart, and for the first time she began to pity me. She watched me; she saw my grief, and all the hidden humiliation of soul with which I prepared for a marriage on which Ralph insisted, longing in his hate and agony to consummate his misery and mine. Then seeing that he could neither persuade himself to love me nor to forsake me, a revulsion of feeling came to her; she called him coward in her heart, and began to hate him. While in this mood, her old lover suddenly presented himself as she walked by the rocks near Trevala. He was not half hers, half another's, like Ralph; his heart was hers, passionately, devotedly, entirely; so, impatient of sorrow as her spirit was, it was natural she should turn to him for happiness, thinking thus to escape from the gloom and strife of Treval. Perhaps, deep down in her heart there lay some thought of vexing Ralph by this hasty marriage, and forcing him to repent that he had chosen honor before love.

"But when she would have brought her lover to Treval, when she bade him ask her of her father, he refused, and left her abruptly. Days passed by without bringing him to their trysting-place, and now that uncertainty and grief came between them, and the thought arose that she should lose him forever, she sounded her poor untried heart, and, lo! it answered her that it was he whom she had loved from the first, and not Ralph. Me she had injured too deeply to be confidential with, but she flung herself in Admonitia's way and tried to speak. She was answered with scorn and withering contempt, and she fled from Admonitia's bitter words to her room, and thence, in her restless fever, she stole out in the still night to the lawn; and there beneath the cedar tree, watching the windows of Treval, she found her lover. He seized her hand, he implored her to hear him, he poured out his heart to her, confessing that he was the son of a poor girl whose lover had deserted her; he had no father, no name; he reviled himself that he had ever dared to address her; he bade her farewell. Then he fled from her like a madman ere she could utter a word.

"Alicia loved excitement—mystery—concealment. Life for her took the shape of a drama, restless with intrigue, plot, and passion, of which she must always be the heroine. She was not ill-pleased, then, at this new phase of affairs, for she thought the next scene would bring her lover to her feet again. But he came not, and Ralph, too, avoided her, and a *real* gloom began to settle on her spirit. In very truth the atmosphere of Treval, laden with strife, jealousy, and hate, was too heavy for any human soul to bear, and hers, now flinching from its pain, took a deadly swerve from the right path. Fearing all the hate and anguish she had caused, and fleeing from it;

believing in her blind pain that she was doing well to escape the sight of my pale misery, and that it was a generous deed thus to crush Ralph's love forever, she wrote to her unknown lover and offered to fly with him. To her dramatic nature the scheme looked fair and charming, even noble; she should relieve my jealous heart from all its fears; she should release Admonitia from the weight of her presence at Treval; and as for herself, her father would forgive her, and all would be well. Thus deceiving herself, she drew so happy a future that she grew to think a deadly sin a holy duty.

"For many days she found no reply to her letter in the old worn windlass of the wishing-well—their agreed place of concealment—and during this suspense she stood one morning—it was the 18th of that dreadful November—in the dining-room window working with some bright silks at a purse. She hung a skein of these to the shutter, and untangling it thus she drew the shutter open, then leaning over into the darkness below she dropped the purse and needles. Lighting a taper, she descended the steps and fetched them, then glancing round the place it struck her as strange and curious, and gathering up her dress from the cobwebs, she explored it cautiously. There was no mystery, seemingly, in the broken piles of steps that mounted to the dark roof, and led apparently only to a decayed rack stretched across the dingy ceiling, but as Alicia reached the upper steps a quivering beam of light fell over her from an archway like a bin at the top. Leaning forward into this, her heart beat as she saw the light came from an opening in the wall of this arch. A moment's search convinced her the whitewash—blackened now—covered not stone, but wood; with all her strength she pushed against it, and a door, dust-laden and hard to move, opened slowly inwards.

"The old legend of Treval referring to a hidden room recurred to her memory, and she instantly concluded that this was the entrance to it. In days of danger this vaulted entry was doubtless filled with wine and baffled searchers. Excited by her discovery, Alicia sprang within the door, and found herself in a narrow passage winding itself upwards by a succession of steps. Hung with cobwebs and laden with dust, still the place was not gloomy, for many a cherub's wing, or sculptured shield, or carved imp had served the architect to hide the opening by which he admitted light and air to this secret staircase that climbed the western front. Continuing the ascent, Alicia reached a door with handle and lock as little mysterious as any she had ever turned. It yielded quietly to her hand, and she then found herself in a small unfinished chamber lighted by a window in the roof. The door she held was in a niche; it was masked by a row of shelves, on which



lay a few dusty books and papers.' A minute sufficed to show Alicia that she must return by the way she came, or pass over nearly the whole of the roof. Her taper was nearly burnt out, and the roof was dark, so she chose the latter route, and passing within the door it swung to noiselessly, but securely. Retracing her steps with more leisure and less excitement, she observed another passage branching to the left; it brought her to another door, and on opening this she found herself in a long, low chamber, evidently the spot of the legend, the secret room of Treval. The window came to the floor, but reached only to about three feet in height, and a black board nailed across the lower part stole much of the light, and rendered the place gloomy. It possessed two doors, the one by which she had entered and another near the window. It was on opening this that her heart for the first time beat with terror, for she found herself in my chamber, and at two steps from her she heard my voice and Admonitia's in our sitting-room.

"Alas! disunion is weakness and sin! Had we been friends she would have run to us and shown us her discovery, but enemies as we were she was only startled by our voices, and she stepped back hastily into the secret room and closed the door. A few minutes more and she was back in the dining-room brushing the cobwebs from her dress, and applauding herself with pride for her courage. Then she stepped out on the lawn, and tried to find the window of the hidden room. Apparently there was none, for she knew every room on the western front, and counted to each its window without finding the one for which she sought. Of one thing she was certain, that it was close to mine; but she long scanned the front with searching eyes ere her mind seized upon the truth. The hidden room lay between the ceiling of the library and the floor of my sitting-room, and it was lighted by the uppermost part of the long Gothic window in the library.

"Quick as lightning Alicia ran to convince herself of this, but on entering the room her belief for a moment was shaken; the carved ceiling appeared so lofty, and the window was skilfully finished within, that no one would have guessed this arched top was not its true termination. But a visit to the drawing-room, whose height she now scanned with a discerning eye, convinced her she was right."

<sup>1</sup> NOTE OF ESTHER.—Doubtless it was the closing of this door by Alicia when she escaped me on the roof which blew the papers from their resting-place, and sent them rustling down the dark arched passage to meet me.

<sup>2</sup> In my search for the window I was only led once to think of the library; but on entering, and observing the gothic point reaching to the ceiling, I gave up the idea as altogether wrong.—ESTHER TREGANOWEN.

"Not knowing whether my father would wish to have the discovery of this hidden chamber, and its communication with the roof and cellar beneath the dining-room, divulged, to the servants, Alicia waited his return from his ride without speaking to any one, and wearying of the time she went to the old well to search for letters. There, leaning moodily against a tree, she found her lover. He caught her in his arms wildly, he prayed her to forgive him, and he gave her up forever! But suddenly, while she was weeping on his shoulder, a man came forward from the trees and beckoned to him. He obeyed the signal, and after conversing with him for a few minutes he returned to Alicia, and now with a strange change of mood he accepted her mad proposition with fierce joy, and implored her to quit Treval with him at once. But Alicia's heart sank at the near prospect of leaving her home, and, hurrying speech upon speech, she talked of other things, and told her lover of her strange discovery in old Treval that day. He listened with eager interest, and implored her as a favor to tell no one, not even her father.

"Why should I lengthen this account? Alicia obeyed him, and the night before my wedding-day she unbarred the dining-room shutter and admitted her lover to Treval. In the confusion of her unformed, inexperienced thought, she deemed she was doing a good deed, and doing it for my sake, who hated her. She came to my room by the secret way and bade me be happy, and I believe, had I spoken one kind word to her, she would have flung herself on my neck and implored me to save her; but, proud and jealous, I was silent. So this poor girl, not much loving Ralph, not much loving this other hero of her romance, went on her way, and brought anguish and destruction on herself and on us. She came to me in the dead of the night, in darkness, and I never heeded how she came, nor how she went. Little thinking what her visit really meant, I only looked on it as a proof of the swelling hatred in her heart against me for Ralph's sake, and I sank to sleep with tears, because my wedding-day was so bitter to me.

"When Alicia left my room she found her lover in the secret chamber awaiting her, and she would have been alarmed to see another man with him, but with his arm around her he whispered—

"Never fear, 'tis only a friend of mine."

"There was no time for further words; he bore her away, and in her agitation she never remarked that his companion remained at Treval. Half carrying, half leading his prey, he took her across the fields to a secluded lane where a carriage and two saddle-horses awaited them. There was a sick terror in Alicia's heart which kept her silent as her lover placed her within the carriage, and, in spite of his soothing

words, this increased tenfold as she witnessed his agitation, and discovered that he was waiting for his companion. An hour passed, and then not one man, but four, crept silently over the wall, hedge and jumped into the lane.

"What have you been doing?" whispered Alicia lower, fiercely. "Villains! you have broken faith with me; you have robbed Treval!"

"He seized his burly companion by the throat, and there would have been a deadly quarrel, but for the other men, who separated them with caution, and insisted on their thinking on flight and safety.

"Too late, the wretched Alicia saw in whose hands she was. She would have escaped, she would have rushed back to Treval, but to attempt it was useless, and she was driven away a prisoner. Her sole consolation was in seeing a kind of nobleness in her captor, who would have borne her back to his father's house had he not have been wounded and overpowered, and made a prisoner like herself.

"She knew not where they hid that night, for days she knew nothing but anguish and fever. At length they put to sea, landing at night on a desolate beach somewhere, she thought, near the Lizard. There are many caves here, and in one of these she, still a prisoner, found her lover wounded and feeble. In tending him, in hearing his sad story, in nursing him back to life, Alicia learned to love him with all her heart. From a little child of tender years he had known no companions but thieves; he could remember no father, no mother. He was very young, and until he loved her he had never, in the mad thoughtlessness of his career, grieved much at his life as a highwayman. Now it was different, and his heart was set on redeeming his life.

"In the cave with Alicia was a young Welsh girl, the mistress or the wife of the burly ruffian whom they all obeyed. She was very pretty, very delicate, and fair. The Welsh and Cornish, being of the same race, are like each other, and there was a certain resemblance between Alicia and Phoebe, which was noticeable at the first glance. As the terrible days went on, Alicia saw with horror, that the villain whose prisoner she was, wished her lover to treat her as one level with this girl.

"There is no marrying among us," he said to her coarsely. "You must have a gipsy wedding when your bridegroom is well enough."

"She bore this patiently, because her lover's respect consoled her. Maddened by her grief, he planned an escape, but in the very act of flight they were intercepted, and the poor Welsh girl, who was aiding them, was struck down dead by the man who called himself her husband. The blow was given in sudden passion, and the ruffian re-

pent of it bitterly. Alicia took advantage of his remorse to send me back my jewels. She did not know the poor murdered girl's chance likeness to her was so adroitly taken advantage of to stop further pursuit for herself. Before the corpse was laid at our door, she was placed on board ship, and in a day or two they sailed for Ireland. Alicia was lodged in a wretched cabin, where situated she knew not. And here her lover, who had all along urged her escape, and, if possible, return home, confessed in despair the scheme was no longer practicable. She, too, thinking of her sister's hatred, could only believe she would be spared from the doors of Treval as a dishonored outcast. For three months she had been in this dread society. Who would credit the story of her innocence now? What other hope on earth had she, save to be the wife of this young man, whom she loved, stripped, though he was, of every veil romance and mystery had thrown around him?

"They were married, but with such precaution and secrecy that my unhappy sister could give me no details which might help me to prove the fact. Remembering the assertions in the letters sent to me, I doubted if there were even a real marriage, but I dared not torture Alicia with surmises.

"She was not left in peace to enjoy what poor comfort she could have with her husband. The young man, she said, had a noble nature, but fiery, impetuous, and his mind untutored, he was easily worked on to a jealousy that became a madness. Even her accomplishments and grace added to this, as they made him feel more deeply the difference in their position and education.

"There is no need to relate the tale that separated Alicia from her husband. Enough that a few months after her marriage she found herself denounced as faithless, while her husband rendered all explanation impossible, and wrecked his and her happiness forever, by fleeing to some foreign land, none knew whither. Thus deserted, she succumbed to her anguish, nor rallied till her child was born; then for his sake she roused herself and concentrated her whole thought on means of escape. Still her boy was nearly two years old before she succeeded. And evidently about this time, from grief, and fear, and the injury she had sustained in her fall, her brain was clouded, for she does not know with whom or in what place she left her child. Or perhaps some motherly instinct warns her not to divulge to me where her son has found safety.

"This was Alicia's narrative. I relate it colored by her own feelings, which throw a halo of romance round a ruffian, and paint a thief with honor and love. I listened to her tale like one in the delirium of fever, and having hidden her all the day in the secret room, I fetched Admonitia at nightfall, and poured out the history to her in rapid words. Then

not giving her time to answer, I brought her into Alicia's presence. But, as I had feared, Admonitia, after one look, denounced her as an impostor, and implored me not to heed the falsehoods of an abandoned woman, who sought safety and shelter at Treval either from her accomplices or her crimes. Thus by my tacit recognition of Phoebe Linton as my sister, I had destroyed all chance of Alicia being acknowledged by her family. I would have appealed to my father, but for the first and only time in her life Admonitia set her will firmly against mine.

"She would not have, she said, the last days of an old man disturbed by a lying tale like this. She would not kill him outright by bringing this poor, broken, wretched creature before him as his daughter. Was her father to be murdered for the sake of a wandering beggar-woman who owned that she had come from a den of thieves?"

"Then I worked upon Admonitia's pride. If this unhappy woman were not Alicia, at least she knew all Alicia's history, and she called herself by Alicia's name; should we send her to the workhouse to tell her tale there, or should we let her die in a ditch? And so I gained permission for the poor outcast to remain concealed at Treval.

"Broken-hearted I saw Ralph that day, and hid from him as I could my misery. For his sake I had virtually killed and buried Alicia when I held my peace at Phoebe Linton's funeral, and thinking of this, and bearing in my heart the crushed and weeping woman once so beautiful, now bruised and blind, wounded and broken, and the root of all her pain lying in our un sisterly strife and his fickle passion, I shrank from him that day, treating him with a strange coldness, till at last he quitted me angrily.

"I think I should have won Admonitia into belief; I think I should have brought the poor wanderer to her father, and trusted to his heart to recognize her; but two days after she came to Treval, I met Paul Polwhele, and I learnt that Alicia's husband, Alicia's child, were the heirs to Treganowen!

"I bow my head in grief and pain unutterable as I make the confession; but from that day I asked myself of what use freedom would be to this poor blind woman, and whether it would not be happier for her to hide her sorrows and her story in sure concealment at Treval? The secret room would render this easy, but at the same time, I did not deceive myself as to the martyrdom and anguish of the task; I knew I must give her my life—my whole life. I anticipated no difficulty from her; she was meekly thankful to be here; she shrank from all contact with the world. All her desire was to hide; imprisonment by cruel hands—perhaps death—awaited her without; for her there were shelter and safety only at Treval.

"The first, the cruellest, blow in my martyrdom was to part with Ralph. The admiral had said, 'Take my son if no holier duty hold you back.' The duty was here, and my way clear before me. For Ralph's own sake I could not be his wife; I knew he must marry Lucy, while I, who had borne so much for him, must learn to bear more, and endure in secrecy a shame; a pain, a grief, before which all my past anguish paled away. And there was no escape for me. I could do Alicia and young Treganowen no good now. Had I spoken when I met the robber at the Wishing-well, he might have asserted his claims to birth, and name, and he and Alicia might have been happy. Now that thought was hopeless, and only shame could come of my speaking. And what shame! Was he not a thief, and had he not impudently said that Alicia was no wife? Should I give Treganowen to such a man? Should I destroy Ralph for him? And my father, so weary of sorrow, so broken in health, could I dare crush him with this tale?—could I dare search out and bring home to him such a grandson? Ah no; I could not do it; so I took upon myself the sin of breaking the admiral's trust. I bore the burden and sorrow of keeping Alicia at Treval in secrecy, while Admonitia only chafed, and my father drew peacefully towards his grave, and Ralph went on his way unconsciously deeming himself aggrieved.

"Oh! pardon me, ye who judge; I knew his character well. If he had to give up Treganowen—his old ancestral place—to this felon's child he would die. And the boy was Alicia's son! I shrank at that thought; remembering his love for her, his horror and loathing of her destroyer, I could feel the additional gall and bitterness that would fill his soul.

"Let these be mine instead, I said, as I bowed my head and wept. I have sinned once for him; it is not so hard to sin again."

"Nor was this all. If I wished him to, have Treganowen I must wed him to Lucy—a compact at which Paul had hinted—I must see another take my place by his side, while I in the solitude of Treval kept watch over the dead.

"Yet a little while I evaded my fate; I knew I must bid him farewell, but I lingered; I waited three, six, eight days before I spoke—

"Ralph, I cannot be your wife." "Not calmly did he bear these words. His indignation burst upon me in a storm of fury. He called me unforgiving, implacable, and vindictive. Above all, he accused me of *not loving him*, of never having loved him; and, cruellest of all, he laid upon me the sin of his change, and mad passion for Alicia.

"I should not have shut myself up in my gloom, he said, morbidly accusing myself, and refusing to see him. That caused it all

Naturally he fled from me to gayer scenes. He was young. Alicia was beautiful, and a coquette. All men would have done what he did—they would have fallen madly in love with her. Men had such follies; they meant nothing—they were nothing. I ought never to have heeded the matter much less have quarrelled about it. Had I loved him I should have borne with him better, and been gentle to Alicia for his sake; but I was heartless, cruel, a woman of stone.

"Good heavens! was he a toy to be taken up and flung down at the whim of a girl? What was my love worth, since there was no pardon, no pity, no warmth in it? On what plea was I going a second time to make him an exile, and reject an affection that had withstood such shocks of time and grief? Was it because in the madness of his love for Alicia he had persecuted me? He had not thought I was so unforgiving, so wanting in sense; he was not accountable for his actions at that time. I ought to pity him. I should learn to make allowances, and not nurse anger for a youthful folly and involuntary change, that in very truth had never injured either me or Alicia.

"In amazement, I asked him to what he ascribed Alicia's departure with the robbers?

"He laughed as he answered, saying it was like a woman's logic to suppose any connection between a band of burglars suddenly entering Treval and his affection for either Alicia or myself. By what reasoning did I make one grow out of the other? Did I wish to make him responsible for the heinous crime of these men? If he had never spoken to my sister, would she not have been forcibly carried away and murdered all the same?

"I broke from him. I ran to my own room. I drew aside the steps, and looked in upon the patient prisoner, who smiled upon me in her blindness, and welcomed me with a kiss.

"Here was the fruit of his love—the folly, the nothing, which I ought never to have heeded. We two were shut up forever—prisoner and jailer—whose task was the harder, whose fate the more cruel?

"It was in looking upon Alicia with the echo of his words ringing in my ears, that my soul first imperatively demanded some suffering for him, in return for all her miseries and mine. And let psychologists explain the mystery if they can, but the more I loved him the more I sinned for him; the more earnest and cruel my endeavors to keep Trenagowen for him, the more resolute and eager became my desire for revenge. Let him suffer something that would teach him the truth—something that would show him what grew out of such 'follies'—that was all I asked. I was sinning so deeply for him day by day, I was watching Alicia grow so woful and weary in her prison, that my breaking heart cried

to me for this relief, and I could only quiet it by saying, 'I mean to grieve him—I mean to repay him some of this bitterness!' Without this I must have gone mad—I must have braved all consequences, and proclaimed aloud the presence and existence of Alicia and her son.

"It was from this strange craving of mine to avenge upon him all the sufferings that for his sake I heaped upon her, that sprang my scheme to separate Esther and Alice, and show him in the hearts of his children some of the anguish of mine.

"He thought so much of coming back to me. Alas! what was that worth to me? Did it restore the spirit of sisterhood and love to us?—would it give sight to the blind, or heal the broken-hearted?—did it wipe out disgrace, or turn dishonor into honor?—could it undo all that his leaving me had done? No, never! His desertion took my sister from me, young, beautiful, and good—his return brought her again blind, broken, and a prisoner. And to the world she was dead—it gave her a place no more—and even her father and her sister would turn from her as a thief and an impostor. And I, who, he said, did not love him—I, who alone could prove that she was truly Alicia Tremaine—I meant for his sake to hold my peace—that he might be rich and untroubled, I meant to keep her here in secrecy, a lonely prisoner till death. To prove her identity, her marriage, the birth of her son, I must arrest Paul and ruin Ralph. No! rather let the murderer go free, and let the innocent remain in captivity! Farewell all hopes of peace!—my resolve is made!

"He left England for India—he left thinking me unloving, hard, unforgiving—he thinks me so still. I, who that day had borne for his sake to hear Paul Polwhele call me 'accomplice.'

"When he was gone—when I knew that it was only in old age and gray hairs that we could meet again—when I had looked on the face I loved so well, and noted every youthful line and beauty for the last time—then I sank down in despair.

"Admonitia, whose heart yearned over me, would have raised me, but I broke from her and ran to Alicia, not for comfort but to comfort her. I tried by a thousand kindnesses to quiet my conscience. I brought old Martha to her, trusting her with the secret, and hoping she would recognize the truth. But no! Martha disbelieved, and gave all her pity to me. Oh, how they have made my soul writhe when they have called me martyr and her impostor! Oh, have mercy on me! have mercy on me! Will no one believe this is my sister unless I prove it by destroying Ralph?

"If Martha, even, would believe, it would soothe me, it would soothe her. She is weary of disbelief—she sinks beneath it—but for me she would die. My belief, my

love, sustain her—the love of her cruellest enemy. When she clings to me and says, 'Mildred, my poor Mildred—my comforter—the only one who would succor me, who would take me to her heart and call me sister,' I long to shriek aloud the truth with a thousand tongues. At such times there is a craving in my spirit like a fire to do some wrong to Ralph—to avenge upon him the wrong I do to her.

"I am not learned. I cannot search out the hidden things of the spirit. I only know that although I loved him with such long-suffering, painful love, yet this desire is become a hunger of the heart with me which will be satisfied.

"Ralph married, and Esther came to me; but I need not speak of this, nor tell how often Paul's story changed, and he claimed the name of Treganowen no longer for himself, but for his brother. Robbers have many *aliases*; so although Alicia calls her husband 'Alan,' I still know not how far this corroborates his tale—I cannot say whether Paul or Alin be her husband. To me these two brothers—if there be two—are alike terrible.

"Her imprisonment here maddens me. My lonely walks with her upon the leads at night—where alone she can get air—make me feel like a ghoulish wandering with the dead. I invent a thousand things to amuse, to soothe her—she answers me by asking for her son! I look at her with tears, and I keep my reason, although there is an unspoken compact between me and Paul that this son is *never to be found*. I tremble when I think the boy is in this man's power—perhaps a thief like him.

"Oh! is there nothing, nothing I can do for Alicia, without ruining Ralph, save be her jailer?

"Sometimes, weeping, I cling to old Martha, and implore her to believe that this poor, patient, blind prisoner is my sister—but she answers me—

"Miss Alicia lies in Trevella Church. Oh, Miss Mildred, what a martyr you are to this poor demented creature!"

"And yet Martha is kind to her, and every fancy a sickly taste can crave is gratified. The little kitchen I have had fitted up within my room has hitherto sufficed all wants, and our secret has never oozed beyond my apartments.

"Thinking Esther might be the victim of my morbid desire for revenge, I tried not to like her; but when she came to me in strange sickness, with all that cold, hard, repelling time of her first sojourn at Treval swept from her mind, and full of the genius and power given her by her mysterious disease, she lavished love upon me warm and bright as her own rare nature; when, like one supernaturally gifted, she understood without a word all my suffering and my love, and wept for me and with me, I

could no longer keep my full heart froming forth to her like a mother's. About I loved her because she believed. Endowed mysteriously with rare gifts, powers of discernment, I had no need say, 'This is my sister.' She knew it herself, even as she had known her own when, as a last experiment to save her father had brought Alice to her at Clifton. Esther's gifts during this of her life were mystic, spiritual, incoherent. Of one thing I am sure: she is Alicia *news of her son*.

"'When Esther is with me,' said I, 'I feel as though my son were nearer to me. It may be a sickly fancy, Mildred, but she seems to me link, the chain, that will draw him to my side.'

"Esther's tenderness, Esther's love broke her from her silence and apathy brought back to her so much of herself, that Admonitia's disbelief was shaken and there were days, even weeks, when she was to her truly a sister.

"During this strange epoch in my life I did not fear her as some did; conversed with her without reserve, I kept secrets from her, and listened in wonder to this child, with her clear spirit-voice, voice of sorrow and pain to come if I persisted in betraying the trust reposed by the admiral. She bade me love my father's honor above his life and land.

"'This orphan whom you despoiled, and this murderer whom you secretly protected so long will surely die in the end, for Justice has a surety,' she said.

"Mr. Winterdale, my bitter enemy, man who would hunt me even to death, Esther once or twice during her somnolence, and his interest took so deep a phase, he was so watchful and inquisitive that I would not permit him to see again. Not that I feared his eliciting things from her; her wisdom at this was far beyond his, and she never once obeyed my injunctions to secrecy. I knew I had brought her face to face with Alicia to cure the fever and frenzied brought on by a sight of her on the island and she would not betray me for doing a kindness. I had saved her life and reason; she was grateful, and no wonder my secret passed her lips, even to her. I knew I could trust her; she would not then; perhaps she hates me. I suspect me, as Mr. Winterdale does, murderer!

"I write this confession for her, because I fear Mr. Winterdale's threats have any presentiment of danger to him; but lately he has been threatening me *through* her, and I cannot fear injury from her hand. If I should strive to make a weapon of

"At my life and honor, I will give her  
 per, and say simply—  
 'ther, pity me!"

"MILDRED SALOME TREMAINE.

written immediately after my interview  
 'ther, on the road between Tregan-  
 and Treval.  
 September, 1805. M. S. T."

#### NARRATIVE OF PAUL POLWHELE.

WRITTEN BY HIM TO HIS NIECE ESTHER.

You have heard of my mother Barbara.  
 was only sixteen when she left her broth-  
 er; she was seventeen when she found  
 herself defenceless and forsaken, thrust out  
 her infant upon the wide world. The  
 man who deserted her left money behind  
 but she was too young to know how  
 to spend it or how to keep it; and to make  
 the faster, she was robbed by the people  
 whom she lodged. She soon found  
 herself penniless, and she sank from place  
 to place, from misery to misery. There's  
 no need to tell it all in long sentences.  
 Enough that she went back at last to the  
 man with whom she first lodged, and  
 begged for help, and for reasons of their own  
 he gave it. By their aid she gained a  
 position as assistant in a shop. She gained  
 by denying her motherhood, and hiding  
 her child—myself—with these people. All  
 the little salary went to them, and in return  
 they ill-used and neglected me. They were  
 thieves of stolen goods; by much cunning,  
 outwardly respectable, but inwardly raven-  
 wolves. I grew up in an atmosphere of  
 which you, Esther, know nothing. I asso-  
 ciated with thieves and vagabonds. I early  
 learned to deceive my mother, who was  
 simple-minded and weak, and too much in  
 the power of these miscreants to dare re-  
 move me from their roof. A word from  
 them would destroy her, and thrust her  
 again on the world homeless. So year after  
 year went on; and ignorant in a great degree  
 of the truth, seeing me only on her rare  
 holidays, she made no effort to break her  
 friends. Thus I went on thieving expeditions,  
 and gloried in my success, while she still  
 thought me an innocent child. At last I  
 fell into prison; and then, when I saw my  
 mother's agony, I awoke in some degree  
 from my blindness; but only partially, for I  
 believed at her grief rather than sorrowed  
 at it. And I soon forgot it; for on being  
 released I ran away with a gang friendly to  
 me for two years, I travelled from prison  
 to prison through different countries. Dur-  
 ing this time I thought little of my mother,  
 and on returning to London, I sent a message,  
 begging her to come and see me. I found  
 she had gained a better place, and that she  
 was now forewoman in a large establish-  
 ment where she was trusted and respected.

"She was only now thirty-one or two,  
 and it is the privilege of beauty to retain  
 youth longer than homeliness can hope to  
 keep it. Her beauty struck me as she en-  
 tered the room where I awaited her, and her  
 joyful aspect struck me still more.

"I did not tell her where I had been,  
 what I had suffered, or what I had done. I  
 waited sullenly for her to speak.

"Paul!" she cried, 'why have you left  
 me so long? You must try to be a gentle-  
 man; you must go to school—'

"What is the matter now?" I asked.

"He has come back to me—he has asked  
 me to be his wife!" and she burst into tears.

"I could not comprehend her at first;  
 when I did, I swore with a fearful oath that  
 she was lying, and that the scoundrel, my  
 father, should never speak to her again.

"In incoherent words she related how the  
 gentleman—whose name, if she knew it, she  
 did not divulge to me—had been engaged  
 twice to ladies of his own rank, who had  
 both died in some strange, sudden way, and  
 struck with superstitious remorse, he had  
 sought out the little Barbara he had once  
 loved. He had sought her, meaning to sat-  
 isfy his conscience by placing her in comfort  
 and competence; but he found her honored,  
 beloved, and beautiful. He lingered near  
 her; he came again and again, and at length  
 he offered her his hand. During this time  
 she had feared to speak to him of me. She  
 did not know where I was, and she dreaded  
 to hear I was again in prison. I perceived  
 by her manner that the fine gentleman who  
 had come back to her had no great wish to  
 see me or to own me. If I were lost in the  
 great world or dead, he would marry with  
 a happier mind. Sullen, proud, and full of  
 bitterness, I waylaid his path next day to  
 look upon his face. He got down at my  
 mother's door and ordered me to hold his  
 horse. I refused, and he struck me cruelly  
 with his whip. I cursed him, and told him  
 who I was. His face turned deadly pale,  
 but he left me without a word. It was more  
 than an hour—an hour that was a year of  
 sullen pain to me—before he quitted the  
 house; then I made my way to my mother's  
 presence.

"She was weeping bitterly. It was long  
 before I got her to tell me the truth. I tore  
 it from her, as it were, bit by bit. The fine  
 gentleman was shocked; his son was a  
 coarse, foul, miserable vagrant and thief,  
 and the fact astonished and disgusted him.  
 True, there was a comfort in knowing he  
 was a son of no account—a creature the law  
 did not acknowledge, and he would only  
 marry my mother now on condition that she  
 never asked him to see this wretched boy.  
 It would do him no good to own him—he  
 was past that; and nothing would ever  
 give him legal rights. He would apprentice  
 him to some trade—tailor, shoemaker, car-  
 penter, what he liked; and it would be his

own fault then if he did not turn out honest. She had always called herself Miss Treloar: she could be married under that name, and her relationship to this young thief could be hidden from the world forever.

"From the wistful glance of my mother's eye, and the way she hid her face from me, I saw she had consented to this cruelty. All that was good in me broke down then, yet I made one effort.

"Mother," I said, 'consent to quit this man forever, and I will turn honest. I am only thirteen, but I have the height and strength of seventeen—I will maintain you.'

"She shook her head. She did not believe me, or she loved that man too well to leave him.

"I ran away that night, sending my mother a farewell scrawl, bidding her tell her betrothed that I was as good as dead to her but alive to him for vengeance, and I scorned him too much to accept any thing at his hands.

"My letter was ill spelt, ill written, and dirty; doubtless, to all refined eyes, thief and vagabond were stamped on it legibly, but it was not all bad.

"Next time my father saw me I was standing at the bar of the Old Bailey, to be tried for highway robbery. The court was crowded, and I did not see him; but that evening, after my acquittal—for the trial was cleverly managed by my friends—I received a purse of money and a letter from my mother. She was married, she said, but so great was her husband's dread of being disgraced through me, that he had not made his marriage public, and would not, at all events, till his aged father was dead.

"This story seemed to me so like a fabrication that I hated the coward gentleman more than ever. I wrote her a harsh letter, laying all the burden of my sins at her door, and I sent my curse to the man who had led her into misery a second time.

"After this I led a wild life on the eastern coast among the smugglers. I made money, I lingered some time abroad, and picked up some education. In this way four years passed—in the whole six, since my mother's pretended marriage, as I thought it—when, on entering a pretty country house on the Devonshire coast, hawking French lace and silks smuggled, I was ushered into the presence of—my mother! Her terror on recognizing me I have never forgotten. A beautiful child played by her side; he was her idol; he was heir to great estates, to an ancient name, to honor, respect, love—in fact to all that, as his elder brother, should have been mine.

"As my mother told me all this, she implored me for *his* sake to lose myself again among the army of vagabonds to which I belonged, and let my birth and my existence be forgotten forever. She pressed money

upon me, but I saw it was offered in fear, not love. I demanded proof of her marriage. She answered, the whole world would know it soon, for her husband was gone to the death-bed of his father. Then she wept as she talked of visiting in triumph the dear brother from whom she had been separated so long. One terrible shadow alone threatened to mar all her joy—myself. From all thought of me she shrank visibly; and I writhed in the pain of my proud heart as I saw how ease, comfort, and new affections had crushed out all her love for me.

"I hated the baby-brother for whose sake she wished me to live an outcast, utterly forsaken and unacknowledged, my existence denied, my death daily longed for.

"I left the house in bitterness—I rejoined my companions—I drank hard, and that evening in the dusk I stole my brother, and at night we put to sea.

"Let all things be fair,' I said to myself. 'Brothers should be equals; we are of the same blood, born of the same father and mother; let both be gentlemen or let both be thieves.'

"Putting this sentiment into coarse language strong as death and fire, I sent it to my father, and asked him if its logic pleased him.

"I took my brother abroad; he had the same associates that I had, but he never endured the miseries, the ignorance of my childhood. I had him educated, for I never lost sight of the fact that he was heir to estates and honors which were mine by right of blood and eldership; and in all the bitter hatred that I poured upon him, I still thought that after I was dead he or his children might enjoy them.

"Five years more and I found myself again off the Devonshire coast. My brother, now about ten years old, was with me, so were many of our band. Smuggling was a good trade in those days, but we had had a run of bad luck, and were consequently in an ill humor. One pitch dark night I and two or three others were rowing sullenly across the Sound towards our craft, lying a mile or two off shore, when we were hailed by a voice from a big ship. Not knowing what fortune might bring us, we answered the hail, and, in reply to questions, declared ourselves a shore-boat plying for hire. Upon this a gentleman richly dressed came on board of us, and ordered us in a thick voice to take him ashore. He had been drinking, and this, doubtless, was the cause of his imprudent act in taking a heavy purse from his pocket and letting the men hear the chink of gold. Apparently he was counting the sum in his possession, when, after a hurried whisper among us, the first oarsman rose and demanded his money. In an instant there was a scuffle, oaths, blows, then the gentleman was overboard, and we seemed to be alone in the dark sea; yet not alone.

for a thousand witnesses of stars, rocks, waves, spoke against us, and a voice rang in our ears uttering the dread words—

“Whoso taketh man's life, by man's hand shall his life be taken.”

“Of all in that boat, every one has died a violent death; I alone am left, and my day is near at hand. I feel the tokens drawing nearer hour by hour.

“We hurried away to our ship, and set sail immediately for another port; and then hearing no inquiries for the murdered gentleman, I gained courage to pay a stealthy visit to that country-house where I had seen my mother. She was still there, still living under a name that I knew to be false; hence her marriage—if there was a marriage—remained unacknowledged.

“I found the loss of the little boy continued to be a wonder among the few cottagers near. Some supposed him to have been stolen by gipsies; others argued that he had wandered to the beach and was drowned, and his body lay jammed between the rocks. I perceived by this my father had kept silent respecting my agency in the matter, and pride and the fear of disgrace had stifled even the love for his child.

“Hearing Mr. Weston was not at home, I made my way fearlessly to the house, and reached my mother's presence. She shrieked on seeing me, and rose hurriedly.

“‘My boy! my child!’ was all she could utter.

“‘He is going on in the same career as his brother,’ I answered. ‘Tell that man that his son and heir—if he be his heir—has associated daily with thieves, and was present the other day when we robbed a man and flung him into the sea. He has no spirit, though; he fainted downright, the puny coward!’

“My mother sank into a chair and wrung her hands piteously. I approached her, though I saw her shudder in every limb; and, leading her on by the hope of recovering her boy, I drew from her that Mr. Weston, as he called himself, had been in no haste to proclaim his marriage with the daughter of a petty tradesman, the unmarried mother of a thief. But after the birth of his son he assured her he waited only for his father's death to do her justice. That event occurred just as he found both his sons were to be thieves. He searched feverishly for the child at first, now delaying the confession of his marriage till he should be recovered; but when his search proved hopeless, and he knew his heir was irrecoverably in the hands of robbers, the idea struck him of denying his marriage altogether.

“It was easy to do this to so simple a woman as my mother, especially as he had arranged his marriage with so much secrecy

and skill that she knew neither the name of the clergyman nor the witnesses. At all events, he now hesitated and prevaricated, and at length told my mother he would never own her as his wife, or acknowledge the lost boy as his heir, if he were brought up under my auspices to be a robber and felon.

“Under this blow he had grown morose and miserly—as men do grow who have no children to save for—and she had learned to fear him too much to utter any strong remonstrance against her position.

“Thus things had continued till about a year ago, when, finding there was hope of my mother bringing him an heir, he had taken her to London, and married her at a dismal city church in his own name. The child had proved a daughter, now six months old. He had grown fond of it; and having recovered from his first gloom and disappointment, he had at last resolved on presenting his wife to his family, and he was now gone to meet his brother at Plymouth, whence he would go on to his mansion to prepare the servants for her arrival.

“My mother added that she firmly believed he had done all that money could do to destroy every proof of the first marriage.

“As she told me this with bitter tears and cries of anguish for her lost boy, the golden-haired darling whose loss had swept all beauty from her face, a servant entered with letters and newspapers.

“He stared hard at his mistress in tears, and harder at the supposed hawker standing carelessly by his unopened pack: then he said, as his country mouth gaped with the news—

“‘I suppose, ma'am, you've heard there's bin a dreadful murder at Plymouth. A rich Cornish gentleman, called Treganowen, has been robbed and murdered, and thrown into the sea. They've found his body off Bovisand.’

“My mother answered first by a vacant stare, then a loud scream; then suddenly a horrible fear passed over her face, and she waved the man from the room, motioning me to hand her the letters and papers. With trembling hand she opened the first, dated a week back, and showed me the signature—

“‘Your affectionate husband,

“RALPH TREGANOWEN.

“‘Paul!’ she said in a frightful whisper, clutching me by the arm—‘say! this is not the man you spoke of just now?—it is not your father whom you have helped to rob and murder! Oh, no! it cannot be true!’

“Then seizing the letter from my hand, she read it through as with some wild, frenzied hope, while I tore open the paper. There I saw the date, the circumstance, the dress described, and I no longer doubted the man I had helped to rob and drown was my father! The sole jewel we had taken from him was a breastpin. I had it with

<sup>1</sup> Marriages could be easily concealed, as at that period it was not necessary that they should be solemnized in a church.



me now. I drew it forth and placed it before her eyes.

"Was this his?"

"A look of horror and recognition was her only answer.

"Calm yourself," I said, in a choking voice. "Do you wish to hang your sons? Remember they were *both* present at this man's death."

"I took from her hand Mr. Treganowen's letter, and read these cruel words:

"You urge me to seek your son; this young ruffian is nothing to me. I deny any relationship to him. No man is obliged to acknowledge such children. He has no claim on me, and whatever claim he may have had on you he has destroyed by his conduct. Trouble yourself no more about him; let him live and die a felon, as he is. Never speak of this young thief to me as *my* child. I have but one son, whom may God restore to us!"

"As I read this, a rush of blood like fire flooded my heart.

"How can you weep for such a coward?" I said to my mother. "He has treated you cruelly all your life long. Even to the last he has withheld from you the miserable right of calling yourself his wife."

"I would have raised her from the ground where she lay convulsed with grief, but she shrank from my touch.

"It will kill me," she said, slowly, "this knowledge that it is *your* hand that has slain your father."

"I hardened myself like molten iron against her pain.

"He has died too good a death," I said. "He cast a girl and her child upon the world, victims of his passion and cruelty; by this act his son is a thief, yet he is without pity. Safe in his name, his position, his *honor*, he has no word to throw to his own flesh and blood, save the cruel wish that he may live and die a felon. Hear me! I wish that, in that world to which he is gone, he may learn to know what it is to live a felon—to be acquainted with misery, imprisonment, and chains—to know hunger, ill-usage, and darkness—yes, and sickness, the festering heat and fever of a jail—and, lastly, may his soul be taught what it is to die a felon's death! If God's angels teach him all this, then when we meet, I will call him 'Father,' and he will not be ashamed to answer 'Son.'"

"I need recount no more, Esther, of what followed. Suffice it to say that, her natural weakness, still more enfeebled by a frenzied fear and grief, my mother yielded implicit submission to my advice. She affirmed that Mr. Weston had died suddenly; she sold off her furniture, she discharged her servants, and seeing that to proclaim her marriage would bring a murderer's death on her son, she renounced all hope of gaining her rightful position.

"I took her to the eastern coast of Eng-

land, but her feeble health was unable to sustain this last shock. She died in a few weeks, although I brought to her bedside the darling son for whom she had pined so long. Mr. Treganowen left no will, and I made no claim on his family for either my brother or sister. Fear for my own safety forbade any attempt of the kind. And I determined to bring them both up in ignorance of their rights, lest my brother, who hated me, or my sister, who loved me, should one day bring me to the gallows. Indeed, I *denied* my brother's rights, and I early instilled into his heart the bitter fact that he had no name, no lineage.

"I loved Lucy. I did what I could for the little infant, who clung to me tenderly; yet, after all, she led a wretched life.

"My brother was a young man, polished and handsome in spite of his profession, when I took it into my head to go to Cornwall, and take a look at the lands which ought to be mine. At this time I commanded a brig which was the fastest smuggler on the coast, and Alan held under his sway a few gallant spirits whom the world unkindly called highwaymen. From our visit to Cornwall arose all the events at Treval.

"I saw Treganowen Towers, and a most intense hatred and envy took possession of my soul. Especially I hated Ralph, your father, the presumed heir, and Alan, my brother, the true heir. I knew this last but for me might easily establish his claim, but now I more fiercely than ever resolved that he never should. I wished him dead, and began to hope that one day I might venture to bring forward Lucy—now a lovely child—as the heiress of Treganowen. From the country gossip I discovered the unhappiness at Treval through Ralph's love for Alicia. I told the tale to my brother, and from his agitation and anger I learned the secret that he loved her himself. He had been playing the gentleman somewhere, and had met this young lady and presumed to address her. I taunted him with his effrontery in even speaking to a lady, and to cut him more, I told him Ralph was his cousin, and it was fair that the man who had his name and Towers should take his bride also. He burst into a fury, and would have gone to Treganowen to challenge Ralph till I reminded him of our position, and asked him if our relationship to the Treganowens did ourselves or our mother any credit? The fact that his rival was of the same blood as himself added a sting to his jealousy which he was unable to bear. "Hate is fierce like a Treganowen," says a local proverb; it only does us justice; and Alan, now that he added hate to his love, was bent on success. I encouraged him to see the young lady and discover her inclinations. Hating all the seed of the Treganowens with a hatred which embraced also the Tremaines, I gloried in the thought of my brother bringing

dishonor on the woman Ralph loved, and the sister of whom his pledged word forced him to marry.

"But Alan had a picturesque code of his own, on which he painted some honor and truth, and it was only by working on his jealousy and love that he at last yielded to my arguments, and made up his mind to fly with Alicia Tremaine. He feared me greatly, and I knew he had resolved, on making her his wife, to go abroad and enter the French service, but I determined he should never carry out this intention. I meant to make him and Alicia useful to my own interests and those of the band.

"Accident gave me the advantage of overhearing a conversation of hers, in which she related to Alan her discovery of a secret room and staircase at Treval. I need not tell you that I made use of this to rob the mansion on the night of her flight. To the very last Alan wavered, and it was only by telling him that I meant immediately to quit Cornwall and he would see Alicia no more, save, perhaps, as the wife of Ralph—for I could not believe that he really intended to marry Mildred—that I at length persuaded him to run away with his bride. I chose the night before Mildred's wedding, thinking the blow would fall with double bitterness on Ralph, since the same day would see him deprived of the woman he loved, and bound to the woman he hated.

"I did not anticipate the hue-and-cry, the hubbub and fuss that moved the whole county of Cornwall. I thought common sense would tell people the young lady had fled with a lover, and so doubtless it would have done but for that injudicious robbing of Treval, which caused such different surmises to arise. The pursuit after us was so hot that we had to hide and use the greatest caution to avoid discovery. To make concealment more difficult, Alan had got wounded in an affray between us on the night of the robbery. Being in love, he could not perceive that our mutual interest obliged me to many disagreeable duties, and among them I count the robbery at Treval. I had promised him that no one but myself should be made aware of the hidden room and staircase, and having kept my word in this, I considered he ought to have been satisfied. He was not, however; and in his disgust at the trade to which I had brought him, he would have destroyed us all by concealing at Alicia's escape. His wound had delayed their marriage, and the wretched young lady was nearly dead with shame, fear, and sorrow. She was hidden at a haunt of mine, and cared for by a young girl who had followed my fortune about two years before. Here also Alan lay wounded, and together they planned an escape. They intended Phœbe to accompany them, but she loved me, and she refused. Unhappily I did not know this when I intercepted

them at the moment of their flight. My life and the lives of my crew, depended especially on Alicia's being kept in safety, for if she returned to Treval every haunt we had would be broken up. This is my excuse for the fury that made me blindly strike down the only creature who ever loved me. She was slain at the first blow. I cannot speak of her, Esther; let me pass this sad story over quickly. She bore a certain resemblance to Alicia in stature, complexion, and the color of her hair; and one of my men suggested to me the idea of stopping the search made for the missing young lady by sending her corpse to Treval. We could give her no burial, save in the sea, and I laughed bitterly at the thought of deceiving the proud Tremaines, and gaining her a resting-place in their vault. On reflection, it scarcely seemed possible the deception could succeed, yet it was worth a trial, so Phœbe was dressed in Miss Tremaine's clothes, and taken to Treval in a wain laden with reeds, driven by two *honest* carters.

"You know how she was deposited at the north porch, and all that followed, and yet I purposely avoided any single written word on, or in, the coffin, asserting this to be the corpse of Alicia; but the first open-mouthed, gaping servant who gazed upon her shrieked 'Alicia!' and sapient jurymen and learned coroner, and relations and friends, all joined in the stupid cry. Father, lover, and sister believed it, and rained down tears on the disfigured face of poor Phœbe Linton. Only two doubted—Miss Mildred and Mr. Winterdale.

"Overwhelmed by Phœbe's death, I had consented to a whim of Alicia's, and restored her sister's bridal jewels. I did not tell her *how* they would go back to Treval, and she hid from me the fact of her having placed a letter in the casket. This circumstance, however, greatly favored the deception, and throughout the country none doubted that the beautiful Miss Alicia Tremaine was murdered.

"Lucy was present when my blow struck down Phœbe. Years afterwards I told her this girl was Alicia Tremaine. I told her so that she might not be too curious respecting the fate of my brother's wife. Lucy—the beautiful little child I had protected from infancy—was now the only creature I loved. I taught her to love me, and I always impressed on her mind that I was her *only* brother, scarcely ever permitting her even to see Alan.

"I did not heed much the cruel accusation of murder brought against Miss Mildred, till one of our gang was shot while following his vocation. Then I found out he had betrayed my confidence; he was a crony of mine, and I had sometimes dropped to him mysterious hints respecting the heirship of Treganowen. These he had sold to Miss Mildred. I guessed that instantly, and by

her singular silence during this terrible period, I formed an idea of her rare courage, and I divined that she was as firmly resolved as myself that Alan Treganowen should never possess the Towers.

"We sailed for Ireland immediately after the burial of Phoebe at Trevalla, and here my brother and Alicia were married. I would have hindered their marriage if I could, for my heart was hot with hatred and jealousy for Phoebe's sake, but Alan outwitted me, and I had the mortification of knowing, that the brother whom I had tried to bring to my level, had won for himself a fair young bride of name and lineage as ancient as his own. I gnashed my teeth as I saw he had found a fitting mate, in spite of all I had done to degrade him; while I, for him and for her, had murdered—Esther can you wonder that I hated him more than ever? And, above all, can you wonder that I hated Alicia, with a loathing that ran coldly and cruelly in my veins, stirring me to bitter deeds every time I looked on her pale face?

"I reproached her often with Phoebe's death; it was a relief to call her murderess,<sup>1</sup> and lay upon her soul the guilt that was mine, and it pleased me to see remorse and grief withering away her life. Not that she dared show any of this to my brother, for Alan's great fault was jealousy—an unreasoning, blind jealousy that demanded his wife's whole soul. Thinking constantly of Phoebe, I would not permit him any happiness; I worked constantly on his jealous nature till I rendered his life a misery to him.

"Can she love *you*?" I sneered—"you a robber, and she a lady? Do not believe her if she says so; she speaks from fear, not love. She loves Ralph; she ran away with you to vex *him*."

"Alan was bound by an oath never to divulge his wife's existence at Treval, but it needed not this to stop him. Jealousy was stay enough; to tell that she lived would have been to lose her. And as for Alicia herself, sorrow, and shame, and terror had so wrung her heart, that she was glad her father and sisters should think her dead. She would never return to Treval to confess she had been the associate of thieves, and was the wife of a robber." There is a curse on marriages consummated in disobedience to parents, and it had fallen on her heavily; still Alan's love might have given her some happiness but for my restless hatred, which would not permit it.

"I had gained an insight into Miss Mildred's character and deep devotion to Ralph, and I determined to see her and speak to

her of Lucy. I began by writing anonymous letters, in which I slandered Alicia. I did not fear to do this. I was sure she had never been deceived by the dead girl in the north porch. She was the only one at Treval or Treganowen who had a head with brains in it, and I respected her sense all the more, and resolved with less hesitation to trust her with the tale of Lucy's birth, because she neither answered my letters nor heeded my demands for money.

"But during my machinations an event occurred for which I was not prepared. My brother escaped from my power, but by some failure in their plans Alicia missed him at their place of meeting, and, frightened and betrayed by her companion, she was brought back into my hands. Alan thought I only held his wife out of hatred to him, and he expected now he was once gone I should permit her to follow. He wrote, beseeching her to join him. She never had his letters! He wrote grandly of redeeming his name by a life of honor, and when he had won fame and the right to respect, he would take his wife to Treval and reconcile her to her family.

"I replied to his letters myself. I told him his wife had disappeared from the house where I had placed her, and Slater—the ruined, dissipated *gentleman* who had joined us, of whom he was jealous—was missing also, and I mockingly asked if he had seen them? With my letter I sent such proofs of my statement that, to a jealous nature like his, they were sufficient. I never heard from him again, and to this day I know not whether he is alive or dead.

"To Alicia I said her husband had forsaken her—no tidings, no letter reached her—she believed me, and she wept herself blind. I was too hard to heed her wretchedness. She sat always alone, brooding over her sorrows, till she grew helplessly weak. Not too weak, though, to try to escape with her child; but she fell in her blindness, and was picked up a shattered wreck. When she recovered from the terrible suffering that held her to her bed for months, we ceased to watch her, and again she escaped with her son—this time successfully.

"She left a note for me, saying she and her boy might die, but he should never live to be a thief. Doubtless she perished, for if she lives I must have discovered her retreat. But, living or dead, she is the only creature I fear; for to her I was so merciless, vindictive, and cruel, that the least of my sins against her would thrust me deep into perdition. If ever she rises up against me I must die; if ever I hear her voice again, the sea will not be deep enough to drown the anguish and horror I shall feel; let me perish, let me go down into the pit, but never let me see Alicia Tremaine, living or dead!

"She *must* be dead; for weak, forlorn,

<sup>1</sup> NOTE BY ESTHER.—Hence the sharp and amazed fear with which she heard my cry on the roof, of "Stop, demon! thief! murderess!"

<sup>2</sup> This fixed but mistaken idea of Paul's was doubtless the reason why he never guessed the truth.

blind as she was, she could not have travelled far. I think she must have sunk at Bristol, for I traced her thither, and then heard of a blind woman falling by the roadside exhausted, who was taken to the workhouse and died there the same night. Thus I firmly believe perished the once beautiful Alicia Tremaine.

"One night, Esther, just after her accident, when we thought her dying, she called me to her bedside, and exacted from me an oath that I would never divulge to any one the secret of the Red Room. Her constant fear was that I should tell my associates, and they or I would use the secret to rob or murder her family. I took the oath, and I have kept it. Hence I cannot tell you this secret, Esther; and even in confessing the fact of there being a secret chamber at Treval, I feel as though Alicia's vengeance would strike me down.

"After her escape I went down to Treval, and gained an interview with Miss Mildred. I met her on a solitary walk, and commanded her instant attention by uttering the name of Barbara. All I shall now relate I wrung from her after many interviews, both of us being too cautious for confidences at first; but I tell it at once to save words.

"I watched how her eyes glistened when I declared the young Treganowen was illegitimate and a thief; and I marked the clear, glad ring of her voice as she said in that case he could never claim Treganowen. Then I spoke to her of Lucy, whom I loved so dearly, and I showed her the certificate of my mother's marriage, and said I was bent on asserting Lucy's rights. Miss Mildred soon drew from me the fact that Lucy knew nothing of these herself, and then she coldly explained that if her claims were legally established they would only entitle her to £10,000. It was not worth my while to risk my neck for the chance of this sum, and I was going disappointed away on this our third interview, when Miss Mildred's sudden, close questions on the likelihood of Lucy's marrying made me guess the truth, that perhaps her child would be the heir of Treganowen. I acted on this guess, and pretended I had found Lucy a husband. After this Miss Mildred and I soon understood one another better, and she asked if Lucy were a girl whom her cousin Ralph could marry. I caught at this scheme—it would suit me better than any other. I should see Lucy a lady, living at Treganowen, enjoying her rights, her name, her place, all which Miss Mildred I knew would aid me to withhold from Alan.

The only hindrance to this plan was Miss Mildred's repugnance to ally Ralph Treganowen with Lucy's robber-brother. Thinking to conquer this by showing her how nearly she was allied to him herself, I told her this very man was the husband of Alicia.

"She turned deadly pale at this, and said that if that were so she would not aid Lucy to marry Ralph, as the marriage would not give her children Treganowen; for if her brother had a child—his *wife being a lady*—it would inherit the Towers; and in her agitation she spoke of some will which debarred him from his lands if he married any other save an honorable lady. Then I perceived that in helping him to carry away Alicia I had assisted towards the gaining of his estates, and I had ruined Lucy's prospects, so in my rage I determined on another sin. Miss Mildred's words betrayed to me that in her heart she gave no *real* credence to the slur I put on young Treganowen's birth, or the slander I uttered against her sister. She gave a feigned faith to these things for Ralph's sake. One strong, unfeigned belief she had—namely, that my father had but *one* son. I determined to personate that one, so I now confessed I was the son of Barbara, the brother of Lucy, and it was I who had stolen Alicia, and I impudently added with an oath that I was not her husband.

"White as death, Miss Mildred listened; then starting from me as though I were some reptile, she waived her hand and bade me trouble her no more.

"'Claim the name of Treganowen for yourself or for your sister,' she said, 'and I will hang you.'

"I retaliated by threatening to divulge Alicia's willing flight and shame.

"'Do so,' answered Miss Mildred quietly; 'I shall be glad.'

"And she looked as if she *would* be glad to have that mystery torn to pieces and thrown to the four winds. Then suddenly she asked if Alicia's child were dead. I denied she had one, but she answered she had had sure word there was a child. I confessed the truth at this, and that I did not know what had become of it.

"'But what matters it?' I asked, 'since I and Alicia had only a thieves' wedding, a gipsy marriage; will that make the child an heir?'

"Her face flamed, and for a moment she was silent; then as the color died away and her cheek grew ashy pale, she said softly—

"'And where is my sister now?'

"I told her of Alicia's escape, adding she was dead, and I had seen her grave at Bristol.

"Miss Mildred looked at me strangely, but without a tear, merely saying, graves were deceptive, and that the poor corpse in the north porch had never deceived her.

"Then she left me abruptly; and so great was her hatred, her shuddering abhorrence of my presence, that it was only after many months and many threats on my part that I induced her to see me again. Then I told her loudly I could prove the legitimacy

of my birth if I chose, as my mother, under the name of Treloar, was certainly married a year before the birth of her son; and it was when this child was stolen by robbers, that my father, wishing to make his next child his heir, had married Barbara again by her true name of Polwhele. But I was a man with blood on my hand, I said, and I would keep quiet if she would promise that Lucy should be mistress of Treganowen, otherwise I would claim my right.

"At the first breath you utter claiming Treganowen," said Miss Mildred, "I will have you arrested for the murder of Phœbe; and who will listen to a felon's ravings?" she asked scornfully. Then she added, while so ghastly a ruffian as I lived, Lucy should never be Ralph's wife.

"She quitted me without a word more; and though I tried in many ways to change her resolve, I found her inexorable, deaf to threats, heedless of menaces: truly I was no match for Miss Mildred!

"Yet during this warfare I knew she went to Plymouth to look furtively at Lucy; and I knew by strict scrutiny and many questions she had discovered that whatever Lucy's failings of vanity and frivolity, no word could be uttered against her fame. In spite of a wandering life of crime, I had guarded her so jealously that not a man in my band dared to speak a word in her presence that could sully her thoughts. And by many a hint of the splendid fortune which fate held in store for her, I taught her to scorn all humble lovers, and I so awoke her vanity and ambition, that the few men she saw hated her pride, more than they admired her beauty.

"It was during Miss Mildred's steady silence that I discovered Alicia had left her infant son at Mr. Winterdale's house at Clifton, and his sister, a widow lady named Spencer, had gone abroad, taking the child with her.

Alarmed, I went in disguise to Trevalla, and saw Mr. Winterdale. I found him Miss Mildred's most deadly enemy. I found that he, too, suspected it was not Alicia whom they had buried in the vault of the Tremaines, and he was living now the life of a hunter tracking down his prey. I trembled for my life. If he once got on the trail of the truth, I might make sure of the gallows; my brother, if living, would know all my villany towards him and his wife; Alicia's name would be righted, and her son, or—more bitter still—my hated brother, would inherit Treganowen.

"There was only one person in the world who could save me—only one person who was a worthy antagonist for Mr. Winterdale—Miss Mildred.

"For my own safety's sake, and to gratify alike my vengeance, my hatred, my affection, and my pride, I wanted Treganowen for Lucy; she wanted it for Ralph;

if we did not come to an agreement soon all would be lost.

"For Ralph's sake she would not stop short even of crime," I said to myself, "but she fears his horror at finding himself allied to me. Well, then, he shall never know it; and until Lucy is safely married, even Miss Mildred shall think me dead."

"I went to Lucy and tutored her. I bade her write to the beautiful lady who had paid her a visit, and say she was in great distress, for her brother was dead. Why make many words of the tale? It was well told, and it succeeded. In less than a year from that time she was Mrs. Ralph Treganowen.

"The story I made her tell was not exactly a falsehood, for I had seen in the papers the death of a man bearing the name my brother Alan had taken. He was a soldier, and was killed while gallantly defending a gun. Alan had often talked of enlisting. I believe it was he.

"When Lucy was safely married, I presented myself suddenly before Miss Mildred, and warned her of Mr. Winterdale's enmity. She scorned me and it, and commanded me never to trouble her again. I reminded her we both had the same end in view, and I told her Alicia's son lived, and might one day make his claims good. Every allusion to her sister always crimsoned her pale cheek, and brought into her eyes a strange agony.

"Never speak to me of *your* child, Paul Polwhele," she said; "by your own confession he has no legal rights. I do not wish to know that he lives. I do not desire to hear where he is. Do not force me to find him, if you wish your sister's children to inherit Treganowen."

"Upon this I gave her no hint that he had fallen into Mr. Winterdale's hands, but I watched that relentless man, and strove in vain to probe his motives and actions."

"After indefatigable search I discovered where my mother was first married, but Mr. Winterdale had been before me and taken a copy of the register. I bought one also, and brought it to Miss Mildred.

"You were born long before this date," she said, looking at me keenly. "And how can you prove that Barbara Treloar was Barbara Polwhele?"

"I can prove it; but what does that matter so I can prove the birth of the son born to this couple after their marriage?"

"Still you are a robber," she answered, "and *your* son, you say—"

"She stopped; she seemed to stifle with her own words. I saw she regarded me as the destroyer of her sister, with a loathing

<sup>1</sup> The almost constant residence of Mr. Winterdale at Trevalla would seem to have prevented any suspicion of the truth in Miss Mildred's mind. For the same reason, Alicia evidently doubted whether her son had reached his hands or not.

and horror that pierced her frame with a chill like death, but I was obliged to go on: it was necessary to make her understand our danger.

"'I have said so,' I replied, 'but I may not have spoken truly. I may be able to give you the certificate of Alicia's marriage. I may be able to prove all her son's rights to Treganowen—'

"'Hold!' she cried suddenly; 'I have resolved to keep Treganowen for Ralph's children, and I will resist all other claims to the last!'

"'Now we understand each other,' I answered. 'You are right; I was born twelve years before the date of that marriage. I can never claim these estates—ourses on my father for his selfish cruelty!—but my younger brother shall not have them. Like you, I want them for Lucy and her children. I will never bring forward this boy, the true heir; but beware of Mr. Winterdale! the day will come when he will do it.'

"Then, as gasping for breath, unable to speak, she leaned against a tree for support, I rapidly explained the circumstances of my birth and history, my theft of my brother, the strange education I gave him, and his marriage with Alicia.

"'You lied in the beginning—you may be lying now,' she answered faintly.

"I reiterated with oaths my statement, telling her I made this confession that she might know what she had to fear—namely, the bringing forward of her sister's son by an enemy—and I trusted now she would provide against it. I added she could see I was an earnest coadjutor, a faithful accomplice as eagerly desiring to cheat the rightful heir, for Lucy's sake, and from hate to Alan; as she did from love to Ralph.

"At these words Miss Mildred trembled for the first time since I had known her. She gazed at me in speechless horror—she put her hand to her heart.

"'Must I bear even this?' she murmured faintly. Then suddenly, though tears sprang to her eyes, she held her head erect. 'You are right,' she said; 'Alicia has broken my heart and crushed my happiness—her son shall not steal Ralph's inheritance. The son of a robber—whether you or your wretched brother be her husband, or whether she be no wife at all—he shall never enter Treganowen as its heir. Go! we understand each other now. Destroy every proof you may possess of your marriage, if it be yours—of your brother's, if it be his—and NEVER bring me tidings of Alicia's son! Yes; we are accomplices—we work for the same end. Come to me when you want help or money—an accomplice has a right to demand these.'

"I saw through what fiery agony this proud woman passed as she stooped to say these words, and I pitied her. Believe me,

Esther, it has only been under the direst necessity that I have ever asked Miss Mildred for aid. I have obeyed her. I have never brought her tidings of Hubert Treganowen. Sometimes by my eyes I have said—

"'He lives; he can be found.'

"Once in answer to this look she replied—

"Paul Polwhele, remember I have the admiral's word that his brother left but *one* son; more, I have your father's word to the same effect. If Lucy acknowledges you as her brother, I deny altogether that this man whom you call Alan is the son of Mr. Ralph Treganowen.'

"To you, Esther, who know her beauty, and the softness and gentleness under which she hides her iron will, and her wondrous power to attract and to subdue, I need not say that I was her slave. I admired her unflinching courage, and I worked for her and for you, without ever hinting to her by a word what I had done or was doing.

"Once I shot at Hubert Treganowen, and once and always I have defeated all Mr. Winterdale's efforts to discover where Alan Treganowen and Alicia Tremaine were married. His emissaries have visited many places, but that bleak, lone church standing above the swell of the Atlantic on the wild western coast of Ireland has not yet echoed to their tread.

"Esther, I write you all this because I can aid Miss Mildred no longer. Whether it be conscience or whether it be death whispering to me I know not, but I must tell the truth, even if I write it in my blood.

"Sometimes I fancy I hear the dying voice of Phoebe calling me to her, or, like one impelled towards a precipice, I feel some ghastly attraction from the dead Alicia Tremaine that will bring me face to face with her accusing spirit.

"Yes, I know that Mr. Winterdale has tracked me down, and I go to my last shelter to die.

"Three years ago I fled abroad to avoid him; in a year he had found me, and sent my nephew to hunt me. I denounced Hubert as a spy, and he was thrown into prison.

"Esther! Treganowen Towers are his; I charge you not to accept them at Miss Mildred's hands. I will be at Treval on the day before that appointed for your marriage; then I will do justice to my brother and his wife, and may Heaven forgive me for the black cruelty I have practised on them both! Look for my appearing, and wait for me ere you speak. I have a sure way of entering. I go to a spot which I have not seen since the night before Mildred's wedding. Surely I am safe there, even from Mr. Winterdale. Yet as I write I shudder, and lest I should never see you again in life, I send you inclosed the name of the church in which was solemnized the marriage of Alicia Tremaine and Alan Treganowen.

"Farewell, Esther! You see I do not

implore you to yield up these riches. I know you will fling them down eagerly, passionately, when you find they are not justly yours.

"Speak comfortably to Miss Mildred. Ask her to forgive me. If I have any sorrow in making this atonement, it is that I grieve her. I would not hurt her for a thousand worlds. If she has sinned, remember it is for your father's sake. And, Esther, when you love, love like her.

"PAUL POLWHEEL."

## CHAPTER LII.

BETWEEN the day of Mildred's death and that appointed for her funeral, Miss Admonitia changed from a stately, and handsome lady, to a woman aged and broken, yet with nervous anxiety she busied herself to get all things arranged with becoming respect, and costly magnificence.

"Esther," she said, "let us have white flowers to place on the bier—pure white—no others. Tell the gardener to force as many as possible to bloom in the hothouses, and when the day comes I will weave them into a crown myself."

Far and near, the county gentry stripped their greenhouses for us, and on the morning of the funeral I brought her a rich heap of rare flowers, all snowy white. Calm and tearless, she sat by the window, weaving them into a garland.

"Esther, there are no violets, no white violets, here," she said suddenly. "She planted some herself on the cedar-root, when she had that fine old tree cut down. I will go and gather them."

"Miss Admonitia, the grass is wet—the violets are scarcely in bloom," I answered. But Miss Admonitia, waiving me aside, stepped out upon the lawn, and in a moment I saw her stooping over the old root, searching for violets. At this instant a servant called me away, and when I returned Miss Admonitia was still searching for violets. Hurriedly I went to her, and spoke in a whisper—

"Miss Admonitia, they—they are waiting. There is no time to gather more."

"I want enough for *two*," she answered. "I gather for her and me."

Her speech was impeded—broken—strange. She lifted her face towards me, and I saw *death* on it. I shrieked aloud for help. Servants came to me; we carried her in, and placed her in the arm-chair where she had sat weaving the funeral flowers. Then, thinking of Mildred still, she stretched forth her hand and took them, and, as her fingers strove feebly to weave the violets to the wreath, a heavy sigh broke from her lips, and her spirit fled.

How could we have so deceived ourselves!

How could we imagine she was bearing up bravely, and would survive this loss? It was folly to think it. She had lived for Mildred all her life long; when Mildred died, we might have known she would die too. To her, what was there left to live for?

We buried them together, and one tablet records their names and their affection.

The will of the two sisters, dated long back, left Treval to my father, and, after him, to his daughter Alice, and though, since Alicia lived, he considered the legacy null and void, and Treval hers by right, yet, since it was her earnest wish still to hide her story and her existence from the world, he took advantage of this testament to establish me at the old mansion, as if it were my right to be here, thus avoiding all remark and wonder.

Shall I prolong this story, now that all interest in it has died with Miss Mildred? Does any one care enough for me, to ask how I fulfilled a task, which had tried the iron courage of a martyr? I had no help in it, for my father shrank from the sight of Alicia, and sought in action relief from his sad thoughts. He rejoined the army immediately after the funeral of the sisters, his last act in England being his renunciation on my behalf of Treganowen. The old Towers were shut up, and given into the care of Mr. Tresidder, who wrote, by my father's request, to Hubert to say that no legal difficulties would be placed in the way of his taking possession.

In Hubert's reply, he begged Mr. Tresidder not to allow his claims to transpire, and desired him to implore Miss Treganowen, as a favor, to let the world still consider the Towers hers or her father's—at least till he could procure liberty to return to England.

Owing him all I did, and dreading the necessity of publishing so strange a family history as ours, I partially obeyed his wish. Mr. Tresidder remitted to him the revenues of Treganowen, and I bore silently the public talk which gave them to me.

With a trembling hand I wrote to Hubert a full history of all that had passed, and I told him, if he would let me retain Miss Mildred's only legacy to me—his mother—I would care for her like—I dared not say daughter, so I said sister. Oh! how long the post was in those days amid war and tumult! But the answer came at last.

"Take care of my mother, birdie, till the French set me free, and may God bless you!"

That was all, and for nearly two years that was still all, that I heard of Hubert Treganowen.

How I loved him through this time, and how I discovered that I had always loved him, let those say who have read this history. But I had no hope now—none. The garland of withered leaves, that I had woven for my chaplet, seemed my only

fitting crown, and to watch the dead, like Mildred, my only fitting fate.

In Mr. Winterdale's haste, he left on the table of the Red Room, my strange manuscript, written during my period of somnambulism. With what joy I read here that *THEN*, when I was my own free, untrammelled self, every secret cleared up, enjoying the full knowledge of Alicia's history, as told me by Mildred, aware of her pitiful desire to injure and grieve my father, as some palliation to her chafed spirit, for the injury she did to others for his sake—aware, too, of my sister's existence, and our mutual love—ah, then let me say again with what joy I saw I loved Hubert, only Hubert!

"Oh, Hubert, Hubert," I cried, "I love you! If I could die for you, I would die joyfully; for then perhaps you might believe in my love. But now I cannot tell it, I cannot hope you will believe it, for was I not nearly the wife of Stephen Tremaine?"

If I could show him this history, I thought, written by the shadowy Esther, who in sleep always came back to her right mind, he would see that *she* loved him.

Sometimes I half regretted this departed Esther, the somnambulist, for—have I said it?—the moment I found her she fled; the searching, the craving, the yearning that had bewildered me so long died away; the old lost look faded out of my eyes, and I was sane, and sound, and healthy as the most commonplace of mortals.

Slowly, slowly the days dropped down upon us from the dull sky, some of them hot and sultry, some of them icy cold, and tearful with the spray of the western sea. Through them all I loved Hubert hopelessly, but not in sullen grief—had I not his mother with me? I will not say what we were to each other; every heart that loves can draw that picture for itself.

Mr. Tresidder and Lord Roscorla kept our secret well. There was no need, then, to tear the history of Alicia Tremaine from its shroud, forcing us to proclaim our relationship to an assassin, and tell that Hubert's father was made by his vile arts a robber; but there was need, imperative need, that Hubert's mother should not remain hidden in her gloomy prison. She pined for air, light, cheerfulness; so Martha and I, after discussing many plans, decided on one that seemed feasible, and, by Mr. Tresidder's help, it proved successful.

We prepared the servants for the arrival of a stranger from India—a Mrs. Treganowen, a distant relation of mine. We made them get a room ready for her; we talked of her continually, knowing that what we said would be carried by many a gossip far and near. Then we improvised a village fête at Trevalla Church-town, and insisted on every servant joining in it; and

during their absence, having the house to ourselves, our visitor arrived unexpectedly. Thus, quietly and without question, did the pale, blind lady take her place at Treval, without causing a surmise or a doubt.

It would be long to tell how she gradually grew better—how light, air, liberty—in one word life, and above all, the dear hope of seeing her son, changed that once woful face into cheerfulness, and some return of its old beauty.

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Mrs. Treganowen heard often from Hubert, but Martha always read the letters to her, and, since there was no word sent to me, I would not ask questions. I bore his silence—I deserved it; what could he think of me? Doubtless he had driven from his memory, the ungrateful girl, who had so quickly forgotten she had owed life and health to his kindness. Sometimes I thought that, even if he despised me, he might write a word of thanks for my care of his mother, but this thought only made me redouble my tenderness to her. She was very kind, very loving to me. She knew I suffered. When my sister married, and came to live at Pen-carrow, she turned towards me sorrowfully. I answered with a smile and a kiss.

"And it is not that?" she asked, hurriedly. "You gave up Stephen for your sister's sake; you have not grieved for him all this time?"

"No! no!" I cried, and my smile changed to tears. "How could you mistake me so? Hubert—Hubert has forgotten me!"

I escaped from her clasping arms, and ran to my own room. There I tried to stop my sobs with thoughts of Alice.

I had seen her often. She had spent months with me at Treval, bringing song and joy with her, like a bird. The affection between us knew no bounds in its confidence; so, from the first, I heard of Stephen's inobtrusive attentions, his calm, quiet, observant manner (perhaps he thought Esther's twin sister might have somewhat of that tarmagent in her disposition), and, lastly, his timid avowal of love. All this—so different to his behavior to me—showed experience had done him good, and I no longer feared for my sister's happiness.

One sunny day in June, nineteen months after Miss Mildred's and Miss Admonitia's death, and three months after Alice's wedding, I was sitting on the lawn reading, when a voice startled me.

"Lor'-a-mussy me, Miss Esther!" exclaimed the voice; "ef you don't kiss me this blessed minute, I shall go clean out of my mind."

"Jenifer! Jenifer! oh, my dear Jenifer!"

I had my arms around her, and crying, laughing, talking we kissed again and again.

"Jenifer! you wicked Jenifer! Why did



you forsake me? Where have you been? What a smart lady you are! how pretty you have grown!"

"Don't 'ee, Miss Esther; please, don't 'ee now, co. You know I never could abide strams. 'Tis you that have grown handsomer nor a pictur'. And how do 'ee think our buffle-head Tom is looking, miss?"

Tom! I had not seen Tom Pengrath standing by, and my face flushed now to sudden crimson.

"Where is your master, Tom?" I faltered.

There was a great clump of laurels close at hand, and from these there sprang a figure, with a merry laugh.

"Why, *here* is his master!" cried the doctor, taking Jenifer by the arm—"decidedly his master. Allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Tom Pengrath."

Trembling I stood looking from one to the other with flushing cheeks, and eyes shining with tears; and thus blinded, I did not see that Tom and Jenifer stole away, neither did I know how I found myself beneath the laurels, hidden by acacia and myrtles, and there the doctor, holding out his arms, said—

"Esther, birdie, may I love you now?"

I sprang to his breast, and wept there such tears of joy as scarcely the angels know.

\* \* \* \* \*

"And you never guessed I was taking care of the doctor for 'ee?" said Jenifer, "Why, in coorse, when I left you I went to him straight. I'd took care of you so long for him, Miss Esther, that I reckoned 'twas time to try a spell of work t'other way; and he had tould me to guard Miss Esther; he didn't say a word about Lady Tremaine. I was to watch Miss Esther, and not mind her wearing my life out by wandering about like a sperret; and I was to write and tell him news of her, which I did with ink up to my elbows, miss; so I couldn't write that whisht news you know of, Miss Esther, so I car'd it to him, and—ugh! Miss Esther! Miss Esther! ef it hadn't been for me, he'd have growed lonesome as a coot; but I talked to 'un about you, and said I knawed Miss Mildred had put a spell on you, and you'd come back to your awn true self afore it was too late."

"And how came you to marry Tom Pengrath, Jenifer?" said I, with quickened breath, for this talk of Hubert made my heart beat fast.

"It comed about mighty easy, Miss Esther. I was telling 'un waun day that he was a chucklehead sort of chap, and the doctor was that kind and good to him that he ought to turn hisself into a cherry-beam ef he could, to show his thanks. 'Wal,' he says, 'Jenifer, I reckon you are right.' 'And there ar'n't narra man en aal tha world,' I says, 'to

fellow tha doctor fur goodess and for truth, leave alone that his eyes would slock any woman from London to Jeerusalem in waun day, and she wouldn't be tired nuther.' 'I never heard nobody express theirselves so well as you, Jenifer,' Tom answers; 'but I'd go furdur for 'un than Jeerusalem—Jeerusalem aint no account—I'd go to Scotland for 'un, I would! Augh! Jenifer, ef you'd been en prison with 'un, as I've ben, and seen how he minded tha sick, and how he had a kind word and a sunny smile a had, and a cheerful look, and a kind deed a had, for every poor soul there, that was wisht and heart-broken, why, dang it, Jenifer maid, thee'd'st think gould wasn't good enough for 'un to walk on, and dimonds wasn't purty enough for 'un to eat.' 'Hould thee tongue, Tom,' says I; 'don't I know waun of his eyelashes is worth more than thy whole body?'

"This is tha way we talked, Miss Esther, and when we found we was both of waun mind, nat'rally enough we married."

I will not touch upon the meeting between mother and son; there are thoughts and feeling no human words can dare depict. I will tell only how unworthy I was of the full joy that stifled speech, when she praised me to her son, and put my hand in his and bade God bless us.

"Oh, Hubert," I cried, when, taking Martha's arm, his mother left us alone, "how can I accept all this happiness? I do not merit your love. I was going to—to marry Sir Stephen Tremaine."

His name choked me, and vexed tears rained over my face.

"My poor Esther," said Hubert, "you do not think you ever loved that gandy bird, do you?"

"I fancied so once," I answered, and a half smile broke through my tears.

"No, Esther, it was my aunt Mildred you loved, not Stephen. You obeyed her wishes unconsciously. She was a woman," he added, "with fascination and power enough to command an army. Shall I be angry that one poor little fluttering birdie could not resist her spell? What a struggle yours must have been, Esther, when you resolved to grieve her and strike all her plans to pieces?"

I remembered my hard battle by the pool, and told him of it.

"Esther," said Hubert, in a grave, sad tone, "will you be frightened if I tell you something of my father?"

"Tell me what you will," I answered, as my face turned deathly pale, "it cannot alter my love for you."

"Esther, dear, I saw him last year. I visited his grave but a month ago. In all joy there is sorrow. I thought to bring him to Treval, but he perished in battle. He was a colonel in the French service. Now, tell me, shall I disturb my mother's

peace with this story and all the narrative of our mutual discovery of each other, our long explanations, his sorrow, and his joy; or shall I let things rest as they are?"

"Tell her!" I answered, clasping my hands. "Oh, Hubert, tell her! for see how glad I am to hear this, and think how dearer than life to a woman is her husband's honor!"

It was a long story—to be guessed at, not told here—and years after, when peace came, we took her and our little children to the cemetery by the river Rosbach, and we read the few words inscribed on a plain tomb:

"TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
COLONEL TRÉGANONE,  
WHO PERISHED AT THE BATTLE OF WAGRAM."

When the time came, we obeyed her wish, and laid her dust by his side.

\* \* \* \*

"Hubert," said I one day, suddenly, "do you mind my being poor?"

"Do I mind your being rich, you mean?" he answered. "The Towers, the estates are all yours, Esther. Can you think I will kill my mother, and gratify a gaping world with this terrible family history, merely to gain a fortune for myself? No. When I marry the heiress of Treganowen, I will take the grand old name, and inhabit the Towers, if she will, not else."

"Hubert!" I cried, touched, amazed by his words, "this, then, is the reason you made Mr. Tresidder keep silence? But I will never submit to this cruel decree of yours—never!"

"Well, we shall see," he answered. "But let us talk of something else, now. Esther, do you know when I first fell in love with you?"

Of course, when he asked such a question as that, I could not talk of Treganowen.

"No, I don't know when it was. If it was at Treval, or at Clifton, it could not have been for my beauty," said I, laughing; "and it was not for my money, as you knew I had none. How ridiculous my little airs of heiress-ship must have seemed to you!"

"It was the first day I saw you," said Hubert. "Mr. Winterdale—rough, good, resolute Mr. Winterdale wrote to me in haste to return to England. He would put my greatest enemy in my hands, he said, when I arrived. 'What have you discovered?' I cried when I reached Treval. 'Have you found the man who persecuted my mother to blindness and to death? Are you sure it was my mother who in such sorrow and wretchedness left me at your door as the child of Alicia Treganowen? Have you gained some clue to her fate—to my father's? Above all, where is this enemy? Set me face to face with him.'"

"Softly, softly," said Mr. Winterdale.

"I have discovered none of the things yet that you demand. Your enemy who disputes Treganowen with you has a character and courage that have hitherto baffled me. I will take you to Treval to-night and show you your foe—a deadly one, the most dangerous you have—a foe whom all your skill will scarcely conquer."

"There was no time for questions. I went to Treval, and there, upon a little white bed, with face whiter than her pillows, they showed me a tiny child, weird and solemn as a spirit, with eyes that had wandered to and fro through the world, and seen visions—had they not come to me in Germany with a dream of my mother?—and brow contracted with pain, and terror, and sickly thought. And this was my enemy!—my rival for Treganowen, the usurper and interloper that claimed my inheritance, against whom I was to wage war to the death! My poor little Esther! I stooped over your pillow, and kissed you, and I vowed that you and I would not be enemies. You belonged to me from that hour, and all the plots that seethed around me were not worth the plot that darted into my brain with that kiss."

I trembled when I heard him tell of his generous scheme to unite our claims. What if it were *all* generosity?

"Do you really love me?" I said, timidly and sadly; "I who have been so—so strange. It is only you and Jennifer who are not a little afraid of me even now."

"My dear Esther, if it had not been for these 'strange ways,' should I have watched, have studied, have loved you? Believe me, I can hold you safe from all the demons of your childhood. Why did I not write, birdie? My mother wrote me, you were sad. How could I tell, till Stephen married, whether your heart really knew itself or not?"

"Oh, Hubert! that sounds like a reproach! I was sad for you. This heart that you accuse of not knowing itself, has yearned for you in tenderness and remorse these nineteen lonely months. It has never *really* answered from you. Shall I tell you when I first loved you? It was when I sat, a tiny child, at Treganowen, with a big watch in my hand, counting the minutes till the doctor came."

"And now he is come, Esther, on what day will you promise to hold him forever?"

"Let it be soon, in the summer-time," said his mother, who had come upon us unobserved, "lest it should remind me of poor MILDRED'S WEDDING."

## EPILOGUE.

Do twenty-two years of happiness give one the right to grieve? I think not, especially if that grief can injure or sadden

others. Therefore, neither tears, words, nor monuments mark the years of my widowhood. My love for Hubert lives now as it did in girlhood and wifehood, in kindly charities and tender thoughts for all.

His death was like his life—a self-sacrifice. In the year 1832 the cholera visited Cornwall. Foremost among the succorers of those stricken by the plague was Hubert Treganowen. He saved many lives, but he lost his own. Two days before his death an eldest daughter—his second Esther, his favorite—was cut down; a few hours afterwards he was himself seized, but there death stopped. I thought to die, too; but I have lived to see my children's children.

In my introduction to this family history, I said, I was writing it for these young eyes to read. Let me in a few words tell my reason for this long, painful drawing out of my past life. I write it in the hope, that this faint outline may in some imperfect degree, bring before them the figure of a good man. Above all, I write it for justice sake, that they may fully comprehend the generosity which led him all his life long to take the second place, letting the world believe that he held Treganowen only as the husband of its heiress. This was the sole thing he ever did that grieved me. Every casual word, every small act that gave honors to me, that should have been his, wounded me to the quick. There were times when I would have thrown off the trammels of silence, if I had not known to disobey, would have been to grieve him. I combated his determination by every argument in my power, till he at last appealed to my affection to spare him. He averred it was for his mother's sake he was silent. When she died, I entreated him now to proclaim the truth. But he put me off again, saying we both owed it to my father to respect his evident desire for secrecy. Chafing, that he had not yet his rightful place, I obeyed him for my father's sake.

During all this time Hubert and I lived at Treval, and my father and mother inhabited Treganowen. He succeeded where even Miss Mildred had failed; he induced my father to live in the old Towers, though he knew they were not his. He did it with playful kindness. "Let us make an exchange of residences," he said, "because my mother loves Treval."

Both my father and Mrs. Treganowen—who lived quietly, making no claim to name or estate—desired earnestly to respect Mildred's wishes. Her will, therefore, remained in full force, and when Hubert's mother died, we quitted Treval for Treganowen, and my father begged Alice and Stephen to

inhabit it. They did so, and at my father's death it became theirs.

Then, again, I implored Hubert to speak, but he answered me with only kindly words and laughter. "Silly Esther," he said, "are we not very happy as we are? What a coil we should bring around us, what a world of mischief we should do, if we began this hubbub! Firstly, as the son of the last of old Sir Theobald Tremaine's heiresses, I should have Treval thrust upon me, and that would be a sad thing for Alice and Stephen. They want it. Pencarrow, you know, is mortgaged to its chimnies."

So at last I saw he would not proclaim this family history in the market-place, for the mere sake of gratifying his pride, or rather, let me say, mine, which would fain have made the world aware, that I owed everything to him. But one day, when I told him with tears how it galled and grieved me that his full worth should be hidden, and wealth and honors given to me which were not mine, he said, with a kiss—

"Esther, birdie, relate the story to your children and grandchildren, if you will, when all those are dead whom the tale could pain."

Thus, thirty years after his departure into that rest, whither I follow him, I have obeyed his wishes, and penned this history. There are none living now whom my words can fret or injure. Poor Sir Stephen—upon whom surely I have been very hard, because my jealous hand could not bear to write a line of praise for any other man save Hubert—is gathered lately to his fathers.

Let no one look now on the blue western hills for Treval. It is burned down, and the Tremaines live at enlarged and embellished Pencarrow. Weddings seemed fatal to the old place, for it was when my niece, Love-day Tremaine, was married to young Lord Roscorla, that an accident occurred which set the mansion in a blaze. Much of the furniture, and the pictures, were saved, but the house was burned to the ground. So perished the dear old pile, whose roof, whose chambers, whose courts, were so memorably woven with my life.

Let me end here with the wedding. I could speak of many others among my own children and grandchildren, but then I should speak of deaths, too, and friends would say I ended sorrowfully.

Yet if we live to any length of years, age, and gray hairs, and eternal partings must come to us all. Ah! do not say these things are sorrowful—though wasted with toil and pain, and watered with tears, they are but steps to that rest which they who live aright shall find in heaven. Farewell!





